

Youth Inclusion and Social Entrepreneurship in Rural Communities of Armenia



**YOUTH INCLUSION AND SOCIAL
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN RURAL
COMMUNITIES OF ARMENIA**

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This publication evolved within the project “EM.P.ACT (Entrepreneurship, Participation, Action) Lab” that is being implemented by Armenian Progressive Youth NGO in collaboration with Youth Cooperation Center of Dilijan and EcoLab Foundation.

The project aims at improving the livelihood of young people from deprived rural and urban areas of Armenia through providing capacity development on active citizenship, participation and social entrepreneurship. In the long run, the project fosters the employability and self-employability of its target population, thereby decreasing the levels of poverty, urbanization and migration to urban centers and increasing youth participation and integration in social, civic, political and economic domains.

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List of Abbreviations

- RA – Republic of Armenia
- NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations
- US – United States
- EU – European Union
- SE – Social Entrepreneurship
- UK – United Kingdom
- AC – Active Citizenship
- CSO – Civil Society Organization

FOREWORD

Dear reader,

We are excited that this publication happens to be in your hands. It is the result of our one year work that we are glad to present to your attention.

The handbook “Youth Inclusion and Social Entrepreneurship in Rural Communities of Armenia” capitalizes the results of the project “EM.P.ACT (Entrepreneurship, Participation, Action) Lab” which we have implemented in the regions of Armenia in 2018 targeting 60 young people living in 16 rural and 17 urban communities of Armenia. Throughout a year, 60 young people have been involved in a long-term capacity development program, participating in trainings on civic activism and social entrepreneurship. Upon successful completion of the learning cycle, 45 youngsters were selected to join internships in civil society organizations or social enterprises, improving their skills gained during the project.

The “EM.P.ACT (Entrepreneurship, Participation, Action) Lab” project and this very publication represent our commitment and commitment of our partners to promote participation of young people in urban and rural communities of Armenia and to encourage their economic integration by encouraging them to start social enterprises.

Raising the level of civic and economic participation of young people and supporting prosperous and dignified living conditions for youth are in the heart of all the projects led by Armenian Progressive Youth NGO. In any country, vibrant civic and economic participation of young people is a guarantee of development. This has been once again demonstrated during the Velvet Revolution in Armenia.

We are convinced that the informed, empowered, professionally competitive and economically independent citizens should be participants and implementers and not the consumers of reforms in Armenia. Through engagement and involvement of young people, it is possible to make the decision-making processes more transparent and participatory.

The implementation of “EM.P.ACT (Entrepreneurship, Participation, Action) Lab” project was an important journey for our team to understand better the needs of our target group and to develop an educational

program that meets those needs. We have gone through this journey together with our institutional partners, experts, trainers and, of course, our donors.

This publication is co-funded by the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia within the “STRONG Civil Society Organizations for Stronger Armenia” project.

Implementation of the project would be impossible without our partner organizations. We thank "Dilijan Youth Cooperation Center" NGO and the EcoLab Foundation for our effective collaboration, the commitment to joint work and for the amicable and interesting work together.

We are grateful to the Center for Gender Studies and Leadership of Yerevan State University and, specifically Siran Hovhannisyán, Lecturer at the Department of Social Work and Social Technologies at the Faculty of Sociology, for the preparation of this handbook.

We hope that in the long term, the “EM.P.ACT (Entrepreneurship, Participation, Action) Lab” project will enhance the self-employment of our beneficiaries, leading to reduction of poverty and migration in Armenia.

GRIGOR YERITSYAN
Armenian Progressive Youth NGO, President

PREFACE

There are many different attitudes towards the people of different age groups and their capacities. When a person is a child or an adult there are many limitations. Not only there are difficulties within the cultural and legal aspects but also in the labor market, politics, and other fields. Based on these exact age features there are many societal expectations from young people in politics and economy. Young people are considered the main driving force for so many of those social processes. Young people are the generation for whom it is relatively easy to find jobs, be active in politics and so on. Also, young people are those who have alternative approaches to the problems and can attempt to solve them in a creative manner.

However, there are many stereotypes about young people as well. Often young people are being excluded from many important decision-making processes. Moreover, there is a widespread assumption that young people are not experienced enough to make strides in society. For that reason, we have tried to present a brief analysis of the situation and the capabilities of the young people in Armenia, by bringing several examples and leaving space for the reader to explore things. In addition, with this analytical handbook we will try to show the important role that young people have in relation to positive change within society. We are absolutely convinced that the fact of being and feeling young is crucial for the development of society we live in.

The young people in Armenia have shown that they were the driving force of political changes with their active participation in the “Velvet Revolution” in spring 2018. Mostly students, which are the significant part of the youth in Armenia, have shown that all desired changes are possible if there is a will and the people are united in their struggle.

1.1. Major Points

Being young refers not only to age or feeling youthful but also to the status in the social structure that implies responsibilities based on societal expectations. Young people is the main social resource for the development of society and the main social model for solving its developmental problems.

Many studies, evaluations, and reports show that the situation and the problems of young people living in urban vs rural areas are different. Most of the evidence shows that the young people living in cities or urban areas have broader opportunities in general. This is a major factor that propts us to give youth in rural areas specified attention to solving their specific problems.

Depending on many issues such as social status, economic situation, communication skills and self-confidence, young people living in rural areas are majorly deprived from the chance to participate in politics and decision-making processes in their communities.

Young people are full members of civil society and they have all the rights to participate in the processes of state and other social reforms in their communities.

The state youth policy in Armenia lacks many crucial points as it is argued in many reports and assessments. Youth active citizenship is widely promoted by civil society organizations and initiatives in Armenia. NGOs in this field have a major role and impact.

1.2. Defining Youth and Exploring the Situation in Armenia

Youth in sociology and in broad social sciences is defined not only as a biological age or a specific period of a human's life but also as a status in the social structure that allows young people to mature, find their place in the society and have many responsibilities in it.¹ The youth is the main social resource for the development of society and the main social model

¹ Scott, J. (2014): A Dictionary of Sociology. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

for solving these developmental problems.²

The term “youth” refers to the group of people of specific age who have differences, shared or split problems based on many factors. Those factors could be of abundance: preferences, interests, values, lifestyle, profession, living area, social and political situations and else. It is important to mention that, for the youth, not only the general specificities can be different but also everyday individual problems may differ.

The experts involved in the analysis of “The situation of youth in rural areas”³ point out that the problems and the attitudes towards these problems among youth in rural and urban communities in Armenia differ majorly. The needs of young people are of abundance and have different shapes and manifestations. They have a significant impact on individual and social development of young people in Armenia.⁴ The same report/analysis states that based on a quantitative survey among youth from rural communities, 16.4 % of the respondents claimed that in villages or rural areas the main problem for the young people are the geographical obstacles.⁵

For young people in Armenia and around the world involvement in the labor market is one of the major “vulnerabilities” as well. As it is constated in the research “Employment of the youth in RA” for the same position the employer hires the candidate that has a university diploma. While recruiting, employers mostly take into consideration the practical skills (24.6%), theoretical knowledge (23.9%), work experience (20.3%), potential (18.2%), and motivation (10.4%) of the candidate.⁶ According to the CRRC annual report “Caucasus Barometer 2017”⁷ more than half of the employed citizens of Armenia aged 18 to 35 (52%) are involved in finance and banking, 47% are working in commerce, and 46% are employed in education sphere (*Figure 1*):⁸

2 Furlong, A. (2013): Youth studies: An introduction. New York: Routledge.
Hurrelmann, K. & Quenzel, G. (2015): Lost in transition: status insecurity and inconsistency as hallmarks of modern adolescence, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 20 (3): 261

3 <http://www.erit.am/media/2017/03/6303.pdf>

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 <http://www.minsportyouth.am/files/post/1463655073-2.pdf>

7 <http://www.caucasusbarometer.org/am/cb2017am/AGEGROUP-by-WORKSEC/>

8 <http://www.caucasusbarometer.org/am/cb2017am/AGEGROUP-by-WORKSEC/>

According to the analysis of “The situation of youth in rural areas”, there is a huge need for young people to be involved in decision-making processes in their communities. This involvement can be achieved not only through teaching, knowledge transfer and awareness raising but also through initial work and activation of the local self-government bodies in order to spread the culture of democratic decision-making and provide these processes with transparency. This report and analysis also pinpoints fewer numbers of NGOs in rural communities. In these terms the establishment and further activities of civil society organizations and initiatives in rural areas are a major precondition for the mobilization of young people and for their voices to be heard in politics especially.⁹

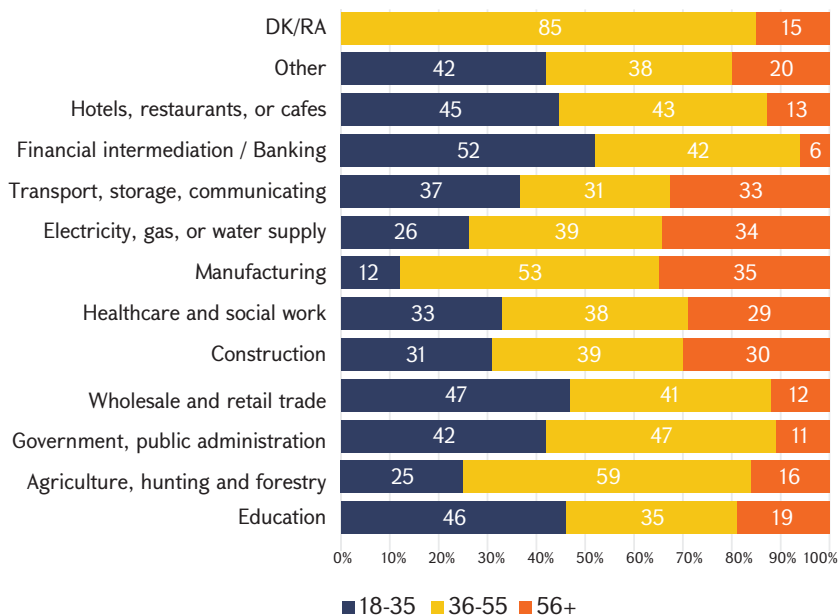


Figure 1. Employment Rates by Age Group, CRRC, Caucasus Barometer, 2017

On the one hand, especially in rural areas the problems with employment are crucial since there is mostly no occupation for young people other than agriculture. On the other hand, higher education institutions

9 Ibid

are not accessible for many young people. Some other issues for young people in rural areas are the gender segregation and discrimination in the labor market, employment based on affiliation (having someone in the workplace that further “gives” you the job), obstacles during competitions because of monopoly of the systems, and many stereotypes and doubts about the capacities and experience of young people. According to experts, young people, indeed, need to obtain some work experience before their actual official employment.¹⁰

1.3. Some Aspects of the State Youth Policy in Armenia

One of the major responsible stakeholders for youth in Armenia is the the state itself which guaratees its involvement in the lives of young people through the activities of the respected ministry.¹¹ This, in turn, guarantees that a part of the state budget of Armenia is spent on the amelioration of the situation of young people in Armenia. In the context of socio-economical, political transformations taking place nowadays, the state’s support to young people is crucial for the involvement of youth in different spheres of public life.

According to the State Youth Policy concept of Armenia, people aged 16-30 are considered young. The state youth policy is implemented in Armenia since 1995. Back in 1998, on December 14, the Government Decree No. 798 “On State Youth Policy Concept” was adopted, which has long served as a basis for youth policy development in Armenia. On December 25, 2014, the Government of Armenia has approved the plan for 2015-2025 concept of youth state policy. Since 2007, the State Authorized Body for the Development and Implementation of the State Youth Policy of the Republic of Armenia is the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, in which a Youth Policy Department operates. The latter is the only structural subdivision of the ministry that addresses youth policy issues. Youth policy programs are developed and implemented by this department.¹²

According to one of the latest evaluations of the “State Youth Policy Strategy for 2013-2017”, the strategy has several pitfalls:¹³

- The lack or absence of the monitoring, evaluation and impact

10 Ibid

11 <http://www.minsportyouth.am/>

12 Ibid

13 How to develop a policy for youth, brief 06/2017

assessment mechanisms.

- Grant-based projects are monitored but, according to experts, there is no evaluation of the results/outcomes of these projects to understand whether the project achieved its preliminary goals and objectives.
- There are no mechanisms for systematic evaluation of the strategy.¹⁴

On the state level, some measures are currently being implemented in accordance with the strategy of the State Youth Policy of Armenia for 2018-2022 that defines the priorities of the Government of Armenia for addressing issues related to youth, offering more argumentative and realistic solutions.

The goal of the State Youth Policy is to create and form social, economic, legal, political, educational, spiritual, cultural, organizational, participatory conditions and warrants for young people and give them opportunities to implement their creative potential for the benefit of the society. Beneficiaries of the strategy are the subjects defined by the of State Youth Policy Concept of the Republic of Armenia, in particular, citizens aged 16-30, youth NGOs, young families and youth workers.¹⁵

Among the various documents of the Council of Europe, the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional life is important. It focuses on the following four key points:¹⁶

- The participation of young people in the local and regional life must be a part of the citizens' participation in public life.
- All sectors' policies should have sections referring to youth.
- Participation, as such, must have different directions and be multi-level in its nature.
- The relatively vulnerable young people (from deprived communities) must have wider range of opportunities.

Young people must also be encouraged to be involved in solving specific issues that have direct impact not only on themselves, but also on their environment, and the society overall, in fields such as education, social protection, reproductive health, environmental protection, community life, etc.¹⁷

14 Ibid

15 <https://www.e-draft.am/projects/482/about>

16 <https://rm.coe.int/1680702379> and Everybody Counts

17 "Everybody Counts: Rural Youth Empowerment in Eastern Partnership Countries", Armenian Progressive Youth NGO, 2018

1.4. Non-State Support to the Young People in Armenia

According to a survey conducted by [Womennet.am](http://womennet.am), the state's support to young people is not sufficient. Even though a number of targeted programs are elaborated and implemented, these are not effective.¹⁸ In addition to the state programs and strategies in Armenia, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working to strengthen young people and improve their situation, as well as to enable young people to be more active in their communities. Some NGOs, working in other areas (such as women's rights, gender issues, promoting peace-building, etc.), also emphasize participation of young people in programs and initiatives aimed at addressing various issues.

Non-governmental youth organizations play an important role in raising civic awareness of young people. The manual, which is in your hands, is developed by "Armenian Progressive Youth" (APY) NGO, which has many years of experience in working with young people and organizing non-formal education and empowerment of young people in Armenia. APY and other similar youth organizations are an important link particularly in involving young people in a range of aspects of life and implementation of changes in the regions of Armenia.

Youth NGOs do not only work and implement projects for young people, but also involve and employ young people in their organizations. This particular circumstance does not only contribute to the solution of problems of youth employment and/or active and intellectual entertainment/leisure in urban and rural areas but can also serve as an example for young people living in Armenia's regions who, in their turn, can self-organize and share experiences, organize different events and implement changes in their communities. Young people are active members of civil society and have a right to fully participate in the processes of implementation of state or non-state social reforms in their communities.

Youth participation can be promoted particularly in the design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation processes of programs and strategies, thus making them more targeted and effective.¹⁹ This way, young people will be more involved in the projects and processes happening in their communities. They are going to become familiar with the current situation and will be able to invest in their communities with

18 <http://womennet.am/>

19 Ibid

maximum potential. Youth activism and participation can be encouraged by providing them with targeted and accessible information, involving them in informal education programs, both through traditional and innovative technologies. In this regard, it is important to take into account the fact that the inclusion of young people with disabilities in the programs of social change should become a priority.²⁰

It is also important to point out that apart from involvement in youth organizations, every single citizen can become a part of the problem solution in their communities. We truly hope that this handbook/analysis will be useful to each and any of us. We do believe that every community in Armenia can become more sustainable if there is a chance to provide young people with support to participate in the decision-making processes.

20 Ibid

2 YOUTH INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

2.1. Major Points

Young people are the warrants of social and political changes. One of the cornerstones of democratic societies is active participation of their young members in politics (regardless of their sex, gender and religious preferences, sexuality and so on).

One of the major directions of the global youth policy is their social inclusion and active participation in different processes.

Several studies show that during last few years young girls have also become active in rural communities of Armenia. However, there are still stereotypes and limitations that many girls are facing in their participation in decision-making processes.

Active citizenship is one of the prerequisites for democratic, participatory and accountable policies and decision-making. It is also a criterion for societies to take the route of development. Active citizenship requires voluntary actions by members of communities to unite their economic, social and political potential in order to achieve major shared goals.

2.2. The Warrants of Change: Youth Participation in Social Movements

Several studies, as well as daily observations, show that young people also constitute an active part of many movements and social actions. In social movements of different types and scale, young people are more active and able to make more effort and energy to demand change.

The pillar of democratic societies is the active participation of their young members in politics. Some researchers and theorists such as Earl, Maher and Elliot (2017) state that in recent decades, societies have been based on movements that make the process of change more tangible and organized. It also enables people of different ages, gender, religion, orientation, and other attitudes to engage in the activities highlighting the

importance of responding to various issues.²¹

Similar cases and events in Armenia are already numerous as well, thanks to the active involvement of young people and their efforts, changes have taken place in politics and/or socio-economic spheres. One of the major examples is the “Dem em” (or “I am Against”) movement that was against the mandatory pension system in Armenia in which young people were actively engaged in self-organization and struggling for their rights and dignified future. “During six months, the campaign has managed to involve a large number of citizens in the struggle.”²² One of the most significant events in Armenia over the past few years was “Electric Yerevan” movement, with large groups of young people demanding low electricity prices and struggling to exercise everyone’s rights.

Another striking example of youth activity can be also considered the student struggle for the right to military deferment in the higher education institutions called “Tarketum linelu a” (or “Deferment will happen”) in which YSU student David Petrosyan became one of the leading actors.²³ The events initiated by David and his associates, friends and followers, regardless of their expected or unexpected results, already show how important it is for young people to fight for their right to education and to move their problems to the political arena. In such cases, young people may claim to be the demanders and full members of the problem solving process.

The struggle for military deferment was essentially part of a bigger and significant event in Armenia, the “Velvet Revolution”, which unprecedentedly successfully happened and is still ongoing in the country. The “Velvet Revolution” of 2018 also showed the active participation of women, young people and different age groups. Young women, such as Anush Lalayan and Ani Hakobjanyan,²⁴ were among the foremost activists who took part in street blockades since the first day of peaceful demonstrations. Previously, women had an active presence in other movements as well. The new wave of civic activism in Armenia over the past few years has been launched

21 Earl, Jennifer, Thomas V. Maher and Thomas Elliot. 2017. Youth, Activism and Social Movements, in *Sociology Compass*, Volume 11, Issue 4, Wiley Online Library, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12465> (Last Accessed July 21, 2018)

22 <https://www.civilnet.am/news/2014/04/03/դեմ-եմ-ի-վերափոխվելու-անհրաժեշտութ/219475>

23 <https://168.am/2017/11/22/872589.html>

24 Ibid

in 2010 with the struggle for Mashtots Park, followed by the creation of many new groups and movements that differed significantly from their actions and struggle in the existing political forms of struggle.²⁵

2.3. Youth Inclusion and Participation

One of the very recent youth self-organizations happened in the US against the gun use, right after the shooting in the school in Florida, where young high school students stood up for their rights in order to stop the possibilities of gun use in the country. This massive self-organization united not only people in the US but also millions around the world who supported young people fighting for their rights.²⁶ These kinds of events once again show the importance of youth mobilization to bring changes and make differences in their environment, community or country as well as be active members of decision-making processes.

The problems in communities can be manifold; from lack of access to clean water to absence of medical, social and educational services in the community, discrimination of people from marginalized groups and so on. Reactions to these issues can and most probably will be different as well.

From the point of view of inclusion of young people, the gender component of the process is of particular importance and significance. Particularly, observations show that young women in rural communities are more restricted in their actions and decisions, although there are fewer opportunities in those communities to include young people in general. In this sense, it is more important for young people to consider during the planning and organization of various programs and events, that young girls must have bigger opportunities to participate and be active.

25 Zaruhi Hovhannisyan, p. 49-54 <https://bit.ly/2RyEnXp>

26 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/21/america-youth-shootings-florida-emma-gonzalez>

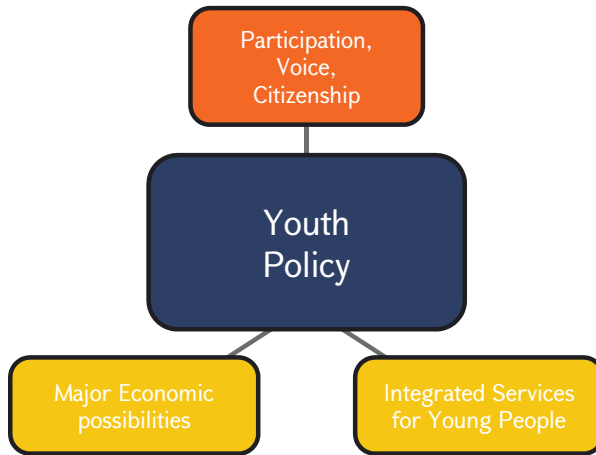


Figure 2. The omponents of Youth Inclusion

The World Bank recommends a comprehensive policy of involvement of young people and their engagement in programs (Figure 2). The proposed multilateral or multi-level policy has 3 main directions that can, at the same time or stage, work on local, national and state levels.²⁷

1st direction: Participation, voice, citizenship which includes the following components:

- Community development through youth initiatives;
- Volunteering;
- Youth councils to promote participation and make their voice heard;
- Human rights.

2nd diriction: Major Economic Possibilities which includes the following components:

- Work consultations in secondary and vocational education institutions;
- Skills development (retraining);
- Internhips, etc;
- Labor mediation (in the form of recommendations);
- Promoting youth entrepreneurship.

²⁷ Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion; Chapter 6, The Way Forward: Inclusive Yout Policy and Institutions. http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/MNA/tunisia/breaking_the_barriers_to_youth_inclusion_eng_chap6.pdf

3rd direction: Integrated Services for Young People with the following components:

- Life Skills Trainings;
- Information and Communication Skills, Foreign Language Teaching;
- Promoting healthy lifestyle;
- Legal assistance;
- Support from peers as well as more experienced professionals (peer-to-peer mentoring);
- Sport events, promotion of team mentality.

The examples of youth policies vary but they all assume direct participation of actors at different levels (local, national, international, etc.). This involves the inclusion of young people in problem-solving processes more smoothly and brings the desired results.²⁸ It is also desirable and important to take into account the gender component of inclusion and participation because besides the participation of young people in general, the activation of female youth in rural communities is especially important. In this sense, as well as taking into consideration the fact that women are less represented in decision-making processes, it is possible to make their voices heard in those processes by additional encouragement and activation of their potential.

As a youth activism advocate, the European Youth Forum offers the following 11 principles to create a targeted and effective state youth policy. The principles are presented below.

1. Non formal education - to promote active education outside of formal education institutions. For example, teaching skills, foreign language teaching, technical skills. All this can be done with the support of open and inclusive youth NGOs.
2. Youth retraining policy - to train professionals and trainers especially for the youth sector, which is a prerequisite for the formation of effective youth NGOs and initiatives in future.
3. Legal Framework for Youth - Develop laws and other legal documents that will involve youth NGOs and groups in decision-making processes as well as ensure effective government efforts to address youth issues.
4. Youth budget - allocate administrative budget, as well as grants to youth organizations.
5. Youth Information Policies - Inform young people about the

28 http://www.cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/CMY%20Active%20Citizenship_0.pdf

opportunities available to engage in discussions with all policy-makers and decision-makers.

6. Multidimensional policies - Develop and separate youth policies that should be implemented at local and national levels.
7. Youth research - periodically systematically explore and identify youth welfare issues, obstacles to it, and the best practices in addressing these issues, as well as the potential role of youth NGOs and initiatives in those processes.
8. Participation - to engage youth organizations and groups in the process of developing and implementing youth policies.
9. Inter-ministerial cooperation - develop inter-sectoral policies that ensure the joint responsibility of different ministries (most likely through separately coordinated centers or agencies).
10. Innovation - to promote and encourage creative and innovative solutions for young people's problems.
11. Youth Advisory Bodies - Establish structures such as Advisory Committees that will have the opportunity and authority to influence the government's decision to respond to youth issues.

Despite the revolution giving young people and others many possibilities, it is now on the shoulders of young people to create their bright future. That is why these kinds of manuals and handbooks are important. These types of materials include significant information about young people's problems and the ways of addressing them.

2.4. Youth and Active Citizenship

Citizenship can not be limited to the list of rights and obligations. It assumes a membership to different groups in which people employ their diverse identities and capacities.
F. Audigier²⁹

Under active citizenship, it is assumed that different youth groups are involved in local political initiatives and social processes of decision-

29 Audigier, F. (2000) Basic Concepts and Core Competencies for Education for Democratic Citizenship, Council of Europe, Council for Cultural Co-operation, Education for Democratic Citizenship project, DGIV/EDU/CIT (2000), p. 23.

making.³⁰ Almost every day we witness that different international organizations sign agreements, parliaments are adopting new laws, different groups are holding demonstrations, people select political leaders, governments and so on. At first glance, these processes have little or no connection with everyday life of citizens. However, just the opposite: any process or change in the country affects citizens either directly or indirectly. A question arises as to how such daily processes affect youth participation and citizenship.³¹ For this reason, it is important to understand how young people can be active citizens for their own prosperity and for that of their societies and states.

Participation of active citizens in different processes should be directly linked and, of course, reflect the peculiarities of the society in which active citizenship is promoted. Moreover, changes in the forms of citizens' participation should reflect the changes in society.³² For that reason, in every social and cultural context, it may be necessary to apply different approaches to achieving the planned positive changes. To what extent are different societies allowing their members (citizens) to influence decision-making processes (including the votes in the elections)? Are relevant actors (e.g. media, politicians) ready to accept the ideas and suggestions of young people and take them into account? Are those same actors ready to give young people more opportunities for participation? Are they familiar with the obstacles to youth participation and their unique needs?³³ These and some other similar questions and critical questioning constitute the foundation of active citizenship that can be accessible to everyone. Active citizenship implies voluntary capacity of individuals and communities to realize their economic, social and political potential and rights in order to achieve common goals.³⁴

According to civic activism researcher Iseult Honohan, active citizenship has three important principles:

30 Andrew Hickey & Tanya Pauli-Myler (2017): The constraints of youth: young people, active citizenship and the experience of marginalisation, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2017.1351920

31 <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1667911/2.4.pdf/64ce8034-440c-4ebc-b325-2fe3be0190f5>

32 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially articles 21 and 27, UN General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948

33 <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1667911/2.4.pdf/64ce8034-440c-4ebc-b325-2fe3be0190f5>

34 <http://www.aughty.org/pdf/activecitizen.pdf>

1. Consciousness/Awareness that economic, social and environmental issues are interconnected and need a multidimensional response.
2. A clear position of self-control and self-determination. In this case, an active citizen is aware of not only his/her rights but also the rights of other citizens, and adjusts his/her activities to both personal and common interests.
3. Deliberate and conscious participation. Citizens are ready to represent and protect their positions, listen to criticism, new suggestions in that regard, and also to be accountable for and to reflect on their position and opinions.

Active citizenship equally assumes participation in decision-making, politics, democracy and governance in communities, as well as volunteering and support in various initiatives.³⁵ In essence, the initiation of changes in the communities on a voluntary basis is what should be done by political activists to raise and maintain community well-being.³⁶ Very often, especially in 21st century, the importance of information and communication technologies and their purposeful non-manipulative use are highlighted in the context of active citizenship.³⁷

The list of actions that can be characterized by active citizenship can be very long and include different directions and people. That exact multifaceted and multi-level nature is the guarantee of healthy and participatory democracy. The list may include actions such as the exercise of electoral rights, active participation in the elections (not only as a citizen, but also as an observer), education and teaching, investment in and funding of initiatives and ideas for positive change, promoting garbage disposal, taking care of nature and the environment, participating in actions towards the elimination of lawlessness and violence, participating in various actions and volunteering.³⁸ Participation in these activities may have different contexts: professional, political and/ or personal. They can have international volumes and nature (e.g. exchange of experience, informal education), and be directed to the well-being of a neighbor or

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Active Citizenship or Activist Citizenship? A Framework for Studying Citizenship in New Social Movements and the Role of ICTs, January 2013 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259390902_Active_Citizenship_or_Activist_Citizenship_A_Framework_for_Studying_Citizenship_in_New_Social_Movements_and_the_Role_of_ICTs

38 <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/eesc-2011-35-en.pdf>

a person. One thing is clear: active citizenship is a cornerstone for all layers of society and for various reasons as it can result in political, social, cultural and personal well-being.³⁹

Active citizenship also implies a certain level of consciousness, on the basis of which citizens make informed judgments. Active citizenship also embodies the belief that every individual (male or female) can make changes in his/her community on local, national and international levels. Genuinely active citizenship, having democratic foundations, is based on some fundamental values and principles: the rule of law, democracy, justice, tolerance, free thinking, and the importance of taking into consideration the rights and freedoms of others.⁴⁰ Active citizenship means responsibility for our own future and destiny. We cannot allow governments to decide everything on behalf of the citizens. It is important that when we gain some knowledge and skills, we can use them for public good.⁴¹

39 Ibid.

40 <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/eesc-2011-35-en.pdf>

41 Freire, Pedro Augusto Almeida. *Giving back to society*. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/eesc-2011-35-en.pdf>

3 Social Entrepreneurship and the Youth

3.1. Major points

The primary goal of social entrepreneurship is to have social impact during and after the planned activities. The social venture is governed by social entrepreneurs in a transparent and accountable manner through involving employees, customers/consumers and target groups (beneficiaries).

Social entrepreneurs, as active citizens, have a pivotal role in the process of social change.

The world and Armenia, especially, which is in the active post-revolutionary situation and processes, need social entrepreneurs who are concerned with certain issues and can involve and lead other members of their communities.

Social entrepreneurs need an idea, creative and innovative thinking, resources and/or skills to find them, flexibility, and action plan.

Social entrepreneurs have an active imagination; they are critical thinkers who seek long-term changes. They seek and find solutions that can greatly contribute to the well-being of the society.

Access to social entrepreneurship can give young people not only the opportunity to realize their ideas and bring about changes. In many cases, social entrepreneurship gives young people (both men and women) a chance to grow and develop on individual/personal levels, become more independent, autonomous, determined, skilled and confident. Young people are more likely to create friendly partnership networks and bring changes to their communities.

3.2. What is Social Entrepreneurship?

When it comes to concrete actions of active citizens, one of the end-results can be social entrepreneurship (SE). In this context it is necessary to get acquainted with some important concepts, which, naturally, may vary according to the situation but at the same time have general characteristics.

As **social entrepreneurs**, people find entrepreneurial solutions to various social issues with great enthusiasm, new approaches, attitudes

and endurance.⁴² Enterprises founded by them create jobs, contribute to poverty reduction, make the world better and create a favorable environment.⁴³ Social entrepreneurs make changes in their communities by working with local residents to address local issues. On the global level, social entrepreneurs are committed to addressing more global challenges facing humankind, such as access to health services, food security, environmental protection, and more. For all of them, the idea is that a number of social and environmental issues need to be solved and they seek to establish enterprises that can independently provide financial stability and bring benefits to their communities.⁴⁴

Social venture can characterize different types of organizations. It can act with different legal frameworks, but each of them should consider its social impact as its only mission. There are several organizational forms. These include volunteer groups, initiatives, cooperatives,⁴⁵ benevolent groups, social enterprises, as well as businesses with a “social” mission or purpose. In a number of European countries (e.g. in Italy) and in the UK, there are more diverse types of social enterprises. Generally, the legal status depends on the organization’s (practical) direction.⁴⁶

Social Entrepreneurship (SE) is a complex concept that involves a variety of social entrepreneurial activities (regardless of the legal status of a social enterprise). In different situations and contexts, social entrepreneurship can be defined in different ways. However, there are some important characteristics that shape a general picture of social entrepreneurship.⁴⁷

The “Social Business Initiative” offers the following key characteristics

42 <http://www.gsen.global/wp-content/uploads/GSEN-Report-Design-5-forweb-2.pdf>

43 Hanlet, L., Wachner, A., & Weiss, T. (2015). Taking the pulse of the social enterprise landscape in developing and emerging economies. Zeppelin University and Siemens Stiftung.

44 <http://www.gsen.global/wp-content/uploads/GSEN-Report-Design-5-forweb-2.pdf>

45 <http://bit.ly/2GhISB2>
http://ysu.am/files/01G_Shahnazaryan_S_Hovhannisyan.pdf

46 <http://www.gsen.global/wp-content/uploads/GSEN-Report-Design-5-forweb-2.pdf>

47 Ibid

of social entrepreneurship:⁴⁸

1. The primary goal of social entrepreneurship is to have a social impact, not to earn profits for founders and stakeholders.
2. Social Entrepreneurship shall be based on its business and innovation forms in the processes and means of production of goods and services.
3. The social venture is governed by social entrepreneurs in a transparent and accountable manner through involving employees, customers/ consumers and target groups (beneficiaries).

In recent years, studies in this filed across the globe show that SE is one of the best mechanisms for youth empowerment.⁴⁹ According to researchers Defoury and Nyssens, SE is one of the organizational forms of 21st century that has attracted not only private, but also public and non-profit sectors and organizations.⁵⁰

Social entrepreneurs, as active citizens, have a pivotal role in the process of social change, because the world still needs many problems to be solved. Those issues are the economic crises, wars, various illnesses and infections, discrimination, deportation, homelessness, health problems, lack of nutrition and social exclusion/isolation, to name a few. In this sense, social entrepreneurs are becoming increasingly needed. The potential and aspiration of social entrepreneurs is to bring about social change among active citizens.⁵¹ As the members of ASHOKA Foundation⁵² note, “every leading social entrepreneur is a recruiting agent for local change-makers”.

The earliest definition of social entrepreneurship was given by J. Gregory Dees in 1998.⁵³ The latter mentions that social entrepreneurs

48 Social Business Initiative adopted by the European Commission. “MEMO/11/735”, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-735_en.htm?locale=en

49 Chandra, Yanto and Shang Liang, 2017. Social Enterprise as a Mechanism of Youth Empowerment. <http://bit.ly/2UoFolf>

50 Defourny, J., & Nyssens, M. (2008). Social enterprise in Europe: Recent trends and developments. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 4(3), 202–228.

51 http://www.yeu-international.org/download/Social_Entrepreneurship_YEU.pdf

52 The Foundation "ASHOKA" is well known as an advocate for promoting and developing social entrepreneurship.

More information: <https://www.ashoka.org/en/focus/social-entrepreneurship>
53 <https://entrepreneurship.duke.edu/news-item/the-meaning-of-social-entrepreneurship/>

are agents of change who:⁵⁴

- Accept the mission of creating and maintaining social values,
- Find and create new opportunities for that mission,
- Are in continuous processes of innovation and learning,
- Perform actively even when there is a lack of resources,
- Have a high accountability for stakeholders, as well as for outcomes of their performance.

The world, especially Armenia, which is in the active post-revolutionary situation and processes, need social entrepreneurs who are concerned with certain issues and can involve and lead other members of their communities (*Figure 3*). And the path to the change begins at young age.⁵⁵



Figure 3. The linear Path of a Social Entrepreneur

As we have already mentioned, anyone can be a social entrepreneur. Social entrepreneurs need an idea, creative and innovative thinking, resources, flexibility, and action plan.⁵⁶ Social entrepreneurs have an active imagination; they are critical thinkers who seek long-term changes. They seek and find solutions that can greatly contribute to the well-being of the society.

At first glance, it seems that most of the work is only put on the shoulders of social entrepreneurs. On the contrary, it is becoming easier as soon as the social entrepreneur mobilizes its supporters. In addition, many organizations finance promising entrepreneurs and among them are those who are particularly interested in youth entrepreneurship and activity.⁵⁷ It does not matter how young a person is. It is never too early to

54 <http://hkdepo.am/up/docs/17.%20Social%20Entrepreneurship.%20A%20Manual%20on%20Founding%20and%20Building%20Enterprises%20.pdf>

55 http://www.yeu-international.org/download/Social_Entrepreneurship_YEU.pdf

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

think about social changes and realize everyone's potential in development and improvement.

Very often, the question is why young people are considered “the best candidates” of social entrepreneurs. Access to social entrepreneurship can give young people not only the opportunity to realize their ideas and bring about changes. In many cases, social entrepreneurship gives young people (both men and women) a chance to grow and develop on individual/personal levels, become more independent, autonomous, determined, skilled and confident.⁵⁸ Young people are more likely to create friendly and partnership networks and bring changes to their communities. Moreover, they realize that they are skillful leaders and can prosper the principles of innovation and change.⁵⁹ In this sense, it is important to include young people with limited opportunities from deprived communities in the social entrepreneurship practice as well. In this case, it is appropriate to value the activities of youth non-governmental organizations and the importance of their services to young people (e.g. trainings, networks, platforms, mentoring, resources, etc.).⁶⁰

58 http://www.yeu-international.org/download/Social_Entrepreneurship_YEU.pdf

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

4 FACTORS HINDERING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG EN.P.ACT PROJECT YOUNG PARTICIPANTS

4.1. Focus-Group Discussions: Major outcomes

In the framework of “Youth EN.P.ACT (Entrepreneurship, Participation, Action) Lab” project conducted by “Armenian Progressive Youth” NGO, the research team of YSU Center for Gender Studies and Leadership Studies⁶¹ conducted a small-scale research. Two focus group discussions with project participants of age 18-30 from urban and rural communities in different regions of Armenia were carried out.

The focus-group discussions aimed at revealing the ideas and perceptions of young people about social entrepreneurship and active citizenship. The following general conclusions were generalized as results of the discussions:

- The youth issues in the regions have different characteristics, based on social, economic, cultural, geographical factors. It is also difficult to find supporters and like-minded people among youth in rural areas due to many different circumstances (which are elaborated in the next section).
- Young people mostly focus on missing or lacking opportunities in their communities.
- Large streams of migration and urbanization in the regions are the main factors hindering active citizenship and youth mobilization.
- Performance failures in the governing bodies and structures in the communities also hamper the activity of young people (for example, Ararat marz). Opinions on this issue are unequivocal: in some regions, institutions are more open to cooperate with young people (e.g. Vayots Dzor marz).
- There is a clear gender segregation and discrimination in terms of AC and SE. The activities of girls in high schools are consciously limited.
- In order to organize trainings and other events in rural communities, young people mostly use their personal ties and resources to recruit participants and get technical assistance.
- In some regions, the lack of civil society organizations (CSO) or their programs is a problem. NGOs can be a “bridge” or a resource for

61 CGLS: <http://ysu.am/gender/en>

young people with limited possibilities and from deprived communities. According to participants, such active NGOs are mainly concentrated in Yerevan and in several specific regions.

- The issue of employment in the regions still remains unresolved among youth.
- In rural areas there are almost no entertainment places, and cultural centers have lost their functional significance in most of the villages.
- Donor dependence is still of a great importance. Very often, young people try to bring their ideas in line with the sectoral direction of donor organizations which they expect to seek financial or other material support from.
- Young people have more theoretical knowledge on social entrepreneurship. In their own opinion, it is also necessary for them to obtain wider practical skills.

4.2. Problems Hindering Active Citizenship in Rural Communities

Taking into consideration the results of several researches, studies and analyses already carried out in this field, it is possible to state that the problems of regional, particularly rural youth, are essentially different from those of urban youth. Experts involved in the “Rural Community Youth Situation Analysis” prepared by the “Community and Youth Initiative Club” NGO in 2016 also indicate that rural communities are different from youth in provincial towns and in the capital, with their needs, problems and their perceptions of possibilities to make changes.⁶²

The needs and problems are numerous and varied. They have great impact on young people’s personal growth and social development. In particular, as a result of expert interviews it becomes evident that the main problems of young people in the villages are:⁶³

- Self-organization (41.50%),
- Geographical obstacles and mobility accordingly (16.40%),
- Stereotypes prevailing in communities (38.80%),
- Participation (31.70%),
- Migration and urbanization (56.30%),
- Organization of leisure (76.50%),
- Employment (77%).

62 <http://www.erit.am/media/2017/03/6303.pdf>

63 Ibid.

Participants in the focus group discussions highlighted the role and importance of young people based on their great potential of change and community development. However, parallelly, in terms of active citizenship almost all the participants mentioned the migration of youth from the communities. In some cases, participants point out also the lack of motivation among youth in rural communities. Many of the participants pointed out that even in the case of a particular project, young people are rather passive in the communities. According to project participants, it is difficult to find supporters and involve others (including young people) in the implementation of any initiatives. According to participants these circumstances are big challenges for youth that must be solved immediately.

The great numbers of migration, according to participants, show the very importance of community changes in regions. Urbanization is also one of the types of mobility among young people. The point is mainly that young people who are studying in the capital after graduating from university no longer go back to their communities/ marzes. However, the number of young people leaving the country is not smaller as well.

Participants from a number of communities also talked about community council flaws which also hamper some community development and do not motivate young people and other residents to pursue a variety of ideas and projects. *“I recently learned that they had been called from the regional center to take the children from needy families to the camp, but the employees of our municipality had sent the program back, refused to undertake it: We do not need them... “ They are unlikely to fall behind any program.”* [Ararat region, Female participant]

In the same community, the organizers of the meetings and youth events also noted the gender differences of active citizenship. *“...Parents of a little bit older girls from high school do not let them to participate in active events: they call it shameful and are doubtful of what a girl can do at the village council. They take all the motivation from us “.* [Ararat region, Female participant]

Thus, it becomes clear that reproduction of gender stereotypes by parents is also an obstacle to active citizenship in different communities. In this case, as in the majority of cases, girls are left out of a number of processes as well as being told that they cannot afford to act as active citizens in the processes of social change.

However, unlike other regions, one of the participants, who was from Vayots Dzor region, stated that their community council encouraged young

people to be active and participate in solving community issues by tackling their employment issue as much as possible. Another young person from Ranchpar community in Ararat region, who also participated in the focus group discussion, mentioned that last year they started organizing different classes for children in their community mainly based on their personal contacts and resources, they have also found a computer and other equipment as well as trainers and covered other expenses. The training area was provided by the municipality in their premises, but in the course of time there were problems; in particular, the relevant employees of the village administration refused to clean the area where the training should be conducted.

In addition to the incomplete work of community councils, some of the young people mentioned that NGOs were lacking in their communities, which, according to them, conditions the low level of awareness among youth on involvement in different programs and activities. In fact, it should be discussed in here that the idea of motivation is not a linear but more a versatile one. It is not the only factor that young people from regional communities do not have the motivation. The motivation can be among young people, but in most of the cases they do not have the appropriate resources. This fact once again proves the importance and significance of such initiatives and active youth organizations.

Participants in focus group discussions suggested that NGOs working in regions and rural communities can be a source of information and a “bridge” between organizations operating in other regions/communities. That is, if a given NGO does not have any youth or social support programs, it can help young people get at least the information about CS programs in the nearby community/region. Here it is appropriate to talk about the concentration of public organizations in one particular region or in Yerevan. For example, one of the young people participating in the focus group from Gegharkunik province mentioned that there are quite a lot of NGOs in their region and many programs are being implemented. According to other participants of this region, these programs and events are of abundance and sometimes they almost do not have free time during the whole summer.

Speaking of the need for social change in urban and rural communities in the regions, the focus group participants emphasized the problem of youth unemployment and the urgency and importance of its solution. In parallel, with the employment of young people, their entertainment opportunities were also mentioned as a problem. Young people say that

most of the rural communities practically lack places of entertainment, and, accordingly, most young people lose their interest in the daily life of the village and point out only the negative aspects of rural life. In this sense, young people find it difficult to see themselves as active citizens and social entrepreneurs as well.

According to the majority of participants, rural and urban cultural chambers, which were the main cultural centers in the early 1990s, have not functioned in most villages today and have lost their functional significance. These conditions deprive young people of many opportunities. As a result of focus group discussions, it is possible to state that a young resident in the village/region does not even have the opportunity to have fun, to participate in film screenings, cultural events (concerts, theatrical performances) or to organize them independently for other community members. The participants also emphasize the importance of self-development and self-organization in terms of not only art or education, but also entertainment.

One participant of discussion mentioned the rural and urban “cultural clubs”, which, according to the majority of the participants, almost stopped working in almost all villages. It is noteworthy however, that in a number of regional towns, urban culture houses are still preserved and used to preserve the city’s cultural life and to organize events. On the contrary, in most rural communities these buildings are almost completely ruined, and some buildings are not in conditions to be used. In fact, it becomes clear that even in case of motivation, potential, and high consciousness, it is difficult and sometimes impossible for young people to organize events and think of social changes due to the basic lack of physical conditions.

During focus group discussions, another problem was also noticeable. Some of the young people mentioned that they were trying to bring their program and/or initiative, to some extent, in line with the sectoral direction of donor organizations from which they were expecting to have an assistance in the form of financial or other resources. In fact, the task of following a donor or a supportive organization’s point of view is also actual in the case of youth initiatives as well. This circumstance can be a problem, especially from the point of view of implementing targeted programs in the community and finding solutions to existing problems. On the one hand, in these cases, implementing programs in communities is becoming just an end in itself. On the other hand, youth engagement can also be activated as they try to activate their communities in any way.

4.3. Ideas of Social Entrepreneurship among Focus-Group Participants

In the final part of the focus group discussion, the research team tried to understand how participants understand and interpret SE. They were mainly referring to more “training” definitions since they had recently participated in a training on SE, organized by the Armenian Progressive Youth NGO within the framework «Youth EN.P.ACT (Entrepreneurship, Participation, Action) Lab» project. The participants, however, pointed out that they lack practical skills and experience from the practical point of view: according to them the necessary practical skills and experience are insufficient.

Some of the definitions of SE given by the participants are presented below:

“SE is a branch of entrepreneurship that deals with entrepreneurship but solves a social issue. The basic component of it is to solve a social problem. In other words, you are engaged in business but solving a social issue. That is, you provide a service that is paid, but it tries to solve a problem, and you’re working on it by working on a new project, a new program.” [Vayots Dzor region]

“The SE is the development of a business idea aimed at addressing any social problem.” [Armavir region]

“In reality, the definition is a bit misleading; it says a non-profit activity, which is a bit controversial... In my opinion, the main purpose of those engaged in SEs should be that profits can not be used for your individual needs, but to address a social problem.” [Lori region]

Referring to the question as to what material and non-material resources are needed so that any young person could have the opportunity to establish a social enterprise or to undertake an initiative, the participants of both discussions mainly highlighted human resources. By human resources they meant not only the involvement of community members in their initiatives, but also the involvement of experts of different backgrounds as the need for their expertise is also felt quite strongly during the implementation of various programs, grants, etc. Experts of foreign languages (mostly English) and accountants were highlighted as some of the most important ones.

Epilogue

From the results of the short study shown above, young people in the regions have, more or less, different issues. Due to migration and urbanization caused by the aspiration to material resources, these young people often lack motivation to initiate anything towards a social change. In some communities, there are no entertainment places, and there are few activities and little interest for young people. Some of the young people are greatly interested in demonstrating their active citizenship through social entrepreneurship but they need more practical skills.

It is important that some young people have the desire to engage in social entrepreneurship and make changes to their communities. In this regard, social entrepreneurship manuals and trainings, as well as contacts with professionals can be greatly useful for them.

A particular attention needs to be drawn to participation of young girls in the planning and implementation of different events as they are explicitly restricted to them. Since active citizenship and social entrepreneurship are one of the most important components of modern progressive societies, it can also be achieved through a series of cultural and educational mobilizations as well.

Thus, considering many issues that young people face in rural Armenia, we tried to present to the reader an unusual handbook. It is packed with a variety of information about youth situation and the importance of their investment in social entrepreneurship activities. This manual, hopefully, will help each person have if not practical but a useful resource to learn more about the field of active citizenship and social entrepreneurship.