Thesis

The role of environmental Non-profit NGOs in sustainable development In the countries of transition. With special reference To “Vardenis” YMCA project, Armenia

Presented in partial fulfilment of the Lund University Master’s Programme In Environmental Sciences
Abstract

The current paper stresses the importance of environmental NGOs’ contribution to sustainable development in the transition countries. The paper stresses the idea that it can be based on democratisation of societies through fulfilment of Human Rights to ensure that principles of justice, equality and participation are exercised in development processes throughout all sectors of societies.

While exploring main concepts used in the paper that include: “Sustainable development”, “Democracy”, “NGOs” and “Human Rights”, the author concludes that these can be observed as interacting elements within the sole Human Rights framework. And the further analysis aimed to demonstrate that enabling this framework can lead to sustainable development in the countries in transition.

The major finding is the crucial role of non-profit environmental NGOs in the process of promoting public participation that can serve the base for sustainable development in the countries in transition.

The topic of the thesis is observed based on three thematic case studies and one major case study of the “Vardenis” project in Armenia used to prove the importance of the role of NGOs in sustainable development processes and respectively enabling environment in the countries in transition.

Key words and expressions: Sustainable development, NGO, environment, democracy, democratic reforms, public participation, human rights, human rights framework, transition regions, local communities
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List of Abbreviations

CESO: Canadian Executive Service Organization
CRNC: Centre for Russian Nature Conservation
CTs: Countries in Transition
DRC: Danish Refugee Council
EAY: European Alliance of YMCAs
ECOLOGIA: Ecologists for Organising Grassroots Initiatives and Action
EU: European Union
FDF: Frivilligt Drenge- og Pige- Forbunds (Danish)
IBHR: International Bill on Human Rights
NGO: Non-governmental Organization
NGOTRC: NGO Training Resource Centre
NIS: Newly Independent States
FNNPE: Fund for Nature and National Parks of Europe
NRC: Norwegian Refugee Council
RA: Republic of Armenia
REC: Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe
SD: Sustainable development
TNC: Trance-National Corporation
TRs: Transition Regions
UN: United Nations
UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees
VO: Voluntary Organization
WCPA: World Commission on Protected Areas
WWF: Worldwide Fund of Nature
YMCA: Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA: Young Women's Christian Association
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1. Introduction

1.1. Overall rationale of the work

The purpose of the thesis is to point to the possible paths of effective contribution of environmental non-profit non-governmental organizations\(^1\) to sustainable development of local communities of the countries in transition\(^2\). The focus is on the NGOs participating in the process of social transformation towards democratic societies in the countries of transition\(^3\) and particular missions they play being “agents of change” while working on promoting sustainable development in the pointed regions\(^4\).

1.2. Sources and methodology used

Development of the paper’s topic, the further analysis and drawing conclusions to high extent depend on the used methodology and materials that serve as constructive skeleton for the work.

Materials used in the current thesis include both original and secondary sources of information: books, articles, thematic and clinical cases relevant documentation, as well as international declarations and conventions. Internet is also used as a reliable data source. The main reference material for the current work became the book issued by the Danish Centre of Human Rights/Institute of International Education in the year of 1993 under the title: “The Role of Voluntary Organisations in Emerging Democracies” featuring Ann McKinstry Micou and Birgit Lindnaes as co-editors. The book by James Connelly and Graham Smith “Politics and the Environment”, originally published by Routledge in the year of 1999 was used as the main theoretic material source.

The study is based on analytical approach using inductive analytical method applied to thematic case studies and deductive method during presenting Vardenis Young Men’s Christian Association\(^5\) major case study. While inductive method applies drawing the final conclusion after the analysis of the facts and conditions, deductive method starts with the thesis idea that further is proved by the facts and other testimonies\(^6\). Also diagrams are used in different sections of the paper to provide analytical framework for some of the discussed topics.

In the paper the clinical case study includes analysis of the project launched for the initial establishment of the YMCA NGO in Vardenis region of Armenia. It is used as an argument tool to present and prove thesis statement. The hand-on experience of the author who worked within the project as YMCA volunteer during the year of 1998 however influenced the position of the author in discussions about the Vardenis YMCA. In the part of the work, “Lessons to be learned”, the “Vardenis” project is evaluated with the focus on main challenges and opportunities. The final

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1 Here and after: NGOs
2 Also in some sources referred to as countries of emerging democracies that are situated in the Eastern European and post Soviet Union region (including Russia and ex-Soviet Union republics) and share common heritage of communist historical past
3 Here and after: CTs
5 Here and after: YMCA
6 Zelim Skurbaty, thesis preparation consultations, Lund University 2001
chapter also explores major findings about the work of the NGO and gives some recommendations regarding possible improvements in its work with the community.

Amongst the used methods, interviewing is used as information collecting technique for the presented clinical case study. The interview was based on the questionnaire created by the author as the guidelines for creating information base for the interview session. The questionnaire in full format is provided in the “Annexure” part of the work.

The author conducted one long interview session that lasted roughly about one hour and took place in the cafeteria of Copenhagen’s YMCA managed hostel for Her Majesty’s guards. The official position of the Danish side presented Evan Johannsen, the Secretary of the YMCA Sportsalliance of Denmark who had made a direct contribution to the development of YMCA NGO in Vardenis and to the implementation of the Youth leadership-training programme here. The opinion of Armenian side was acquired through the Assessment report prepared for the Vardenis YMCA by the President of Vardenis YMCA, Vardan Hambardzumyan in the year of 1998. The most recent document used in the current work however was the Assessment report from the year of 2001 submitted by the Canadian expert David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001 to the Vardenis YMCA President and Board Committee.

Annexure also include one clinical case study related document, “YMCA Vardenis Strategic Plan 2001-2005”, as well as questionnaire used during interview with Evan Johannsen, the Secretary of the Danish Sportsalliance of YMCAs.

1.3. Stated objectives of the paper

Having stated the general goal of the thesis, i.e. “to point to the possible paths of effective contribution of environmental non-profit non-governmental organizations to sustainable development of local communities of the countries in transition”, it is essential to define the objectives of the work that together contribute to the vision and create the conditions for the accomplishment of the overall goal.

The current paper aims at achieving the following objectives that will serve as guidelines and check points in order to arrive at final conclusions and recommendations regarding the stated goal of the thesis:

- To explain the relationship between the concepts of democracy, sustainable development, NGOs and Human Rights
- To analyse the role of NGOs in promotion of sustainable development in local communities of the transition regions based on the provided thematic case studies
- To assess results of the “Vardenis” project, which was initially launched for the establishment of the Vardenis YMCA, from the point of contribution to sustainable development of the local community

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7 See supra p. 7, Introduction, 1.1. Overall rationale of the work
8 Here and after: TRs
9 Here and after: SD
To observe some major challenges and opportunities Vardenis YMCA has to face in its work with referring to experience of NGOs in countries in transition other than Armenia

And finally give some recommendations regarding improvements that may make work of the Vardenis YMCA more effective.

The stated order in which the objectives are set is served as to ensure that it provides for the logical flow of the study process. It starts with some preliminary information like “relevant concepts” and moves towards more complicated core part of analysing environmental NGO activities and their impacts on local communities. It concludes with the final part dedicated to the clinical case study, challenges and opportunities and recommendations for further advancements in the NGO’s work.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Clarification of relevant concepts

As mentioned before it is essential that the explication of major concepts be provided to make the reader acquainted with them and the way they are implicated in the current work. This part of the work includes observation of such concepts as “NGO”, “Enabling Environment”, “SD”, “Deliberative democracy”, and “Human Rights” that are linked together into one framework that best describes principles of NGOs or voluntary organisations.

I. “NGOs”

NGOs also known as VOIs occupy the so-called 3rd sector of civil society sharing space between economy and the state. Defined as “non-profit non-governmental organisations, organised by groups of people in the sphere of civil society” NGOs work to promote well-being of society and build their power on voluntary participation of citizens. Both terms are widely used in media and relevant literature. Nevertheless, the term “voluntary organisations” may somehow sound ambiguous making reader to believe that people involved in such structures may not be paid for their work or lack highly professional skills. On the other hand, neither does the term “NGO” provide for completely clear understanding of the concept of NGOs since it is also used in a broader sense to encompass any organisation, which is literally non-governmental. Thus social formations like political parties, liberation movements, professional or trade unions, industrial federations, academic bodies, etc. can also be defined as NGO.

However, the current paper uses this term to refer particularly to environmental non-profit NGOs since the author finds they are the key players participating in the process of sustainable development as they actively advocate for the environment. Their participation in this process is expressed through active communication with different “stakeholder groups”. In the context of the

10 Here and after: VOIs
12 Ibid
13 Annexes: Defming the Public and NGOs, paragraph 5, REC (Regional Environmental Center) on http://www.rec.org/REC/Publications/HealthyDecisions/HDAnnexes.html Page last updated - data not available. Page first accessed on 05/12/2001 from Lund University, Sweden
14 Further in this work term “NGO” is used by the author to refer to environment-specific non-profit NGOs
15 See inferus p. 18: 2.1. Green Advocacy
paper NGO members, community, the state and partner organizations are observed as the key stakeholders that take interest in NGOs’ work. However, the nature can also be observed as a kind of stakeholder that has its interests that are represented and defended by NGOs based on the it is seen as holding intrinsic value and having the right to be protected and preserved for its own sake.

Considering interests and needs of stakeholders is very important for NGOs if the latest intend to create policy implementing which will enable them to become strategic “agents of change” in CTs. In this work, public participation is seen as the main idea about NGOs that act as independent or deliberative institutions and play key role “in the articulation of the demands of citizens through active participation and consciousness-raising”16, so that NGOs can be addressed as “agents of change” that work in the field of promoting public participation and in a way serve as symbol for it.

Later on, the paper observes some examples of NGO activities designed and implemented within the frame of their policy of becoming “agents of change”.

II. “Sustainable development”

For the first time in the human history the term “sustainable development” was officially introduced in the Brundtland report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”17. However this definition was too broad and would allowed for too many interpretations depending on how it was understood and employed by diversity of people and interests. The problem with interpreting sustainable development can be that it incorporates number of concepts that are equally contested.

The key concepts initially incorporated into paradigm of SD were economic and social development and environmental protection. Yet, the main debates roam about prioritising concepts and the ways in which balance was to be achieved18. The recognition of links between the social and economical practices and the natural environment requires the integration of economic development and the environmental protection. In its turn environmental protection can be interpreted as nature conservation that keeps the use of the natural resources so limited that they are just enough for fulfilling human basic needs or as the sustainable use of natural resources. Then the question rises regarding the extent to which the environmental protection should be addressed in the light of the relations with economical and social aspects of sustainable development. Should the environmental loss be traded against the economic profit? Can man made capital really substitute natural? How can we define nature of our obligations towards future generations and what practices do these obligations include? These are the questions that yet have to be answered in order to arrive at some acceptable point at which the ecological and the economical concepts could be balanced against each other. However the contradiction also appears when looking at the socio-economical dimensions of sustainable development. What do we mean when talking about quality of life? Is it merely economic welfare? And can it serve the overall indicator of social well-being? The first attempt to balance these concepts against each other was reflected in the theory of “eco-modernism”. It stressed the joint implementation of economic growth, social development and environmental protection, while concluding that continued economic growth was essential for

17 Brundtland report, *Our Common Future*
environmental protection. However the weak point of this interpretation is that it adopted economic growth as the major precondition for the environmental protection. Economic growth that is measured in the quantities and volumes of production also means continuous exploitation of natural resources. Especially it becomes an internationally debated issue since through the mechanism of TNCs\(^{19}\) developed world puts additional stress on the environment of developing nations causing continual environmental degradation here\(^{20}\). Thus such approach would hardly create the balance between economic, social and the environmental aspects of SD. Another attempt to find solutions for bringing together environmental and development issues on the worldwide scale was made at the Rio de Janeiro’s Earth Summit in 1992 that introduced Agenda 21, the official document that should serve as a guideline for the states as they work on creating sustainable development policies. This document was criticised for not having reflected on the major factors like TNCs, global militarism and the capitalist system that contribute to environmental degradation and deepening poverty in the developing world. However, it stressed the importance of cooperation between states and the NGO structures as well as respect and fulfilment of rights of all humans including minority groups for development, healthy environment, education and free participation as the main prerequisites for SD of society\(^{21}\). Thus this interpretation of SD focused on the importance of the “public participation” as a factor in social development processes that could help to balance the economical and the environmental aspects of SD. However, it can be argued that this approach would rather sharpen the disagreements between the two aspects of SD than lead to consensus, depending on which aspect is prioritised in development policies and what structures and forces represent opposite opinions. The element of public participation brings more diversity and more participating actors into decision-making processes. This, on one hand, results in diversity of opinions, allows for bigger deliberation during decision-making processes, but on the other hand results in complication of final decision-making that in this case involve higher degree of participation and must account for bigger diversity of opinions. Nonetheless, the recognition of links between the poverty, which is seen today the biggest challenge to be addressed in developing countries and the environmental degradation, give new perspectives to SD and create new opportunities for starting dialog between major decision-making forces represented today on one side by the states and on the other side by NGOs. Further on: the concept of deliberative democracy can be used as a tool for stimulating public participation in the countries in transition. Within the context of this work participation is seen as an instrument of change that can help break exclusion of poor and minorities in decision-making processes and provide people with the basis for their more direct involvement in development initiatives. If considering deliberative democracy as a means for enabling public participation in the CTs, the process of SD can shape up as a process of socio-economic reforms based on the increased public participation that targets fulfilment of Human Rights, and first of all right to development\(^{22}\). The following chapter will try to provide the reasoning beyond selecting this particular form of democracy, as a means that can promote public participation.

III. “Deliberative democracy”: a tool for promoting public participation in the countries in transition?

\(^{19}\) Trance-National Corporations

\(^{20}\) Ibid: p. 57


Deliberative democracy is a concept that best addresses problems of representation and authority. While having “reason” as the keystone of deliberative discourse, it allows participants shape collective decision on the base of the best argument presented. It is based on the principle of equality in decision-making by granting each participating member equal standing to put issues on the agenda, suggest solutions, and advance reasons for “pros” or “cons” of the reasons behind the proposals of others. Deliberative democracy also is about free and open exchange of information so that participants are equal in having opportunities for discovering and legitimating the choice on the matter that would best serve the participant’s interest. Thus deliberative democracy concept allows for decentralisation with local decision-making processes involving higher degree of participation that leads to pluralism of values and opinions. Despite the current work does not aim at providing in depth analysis of this forms of democracy in relation to other existing forms, however, it will try to show in short some reasons that could make this form of democracy attractive when talking about promotion of public participation.

Unlike liberal pluralist political theories, deliberative democracy does not presume that participants have a fixed ordering of preferences when they involve into collective action. Rather, it assumes that the public itself can generate opportunities for forming, refining, and revising preferences through discourse that takes various perspectives into account and orients itself towards mutual understanding and common action. Thus it aims at creating a responsible citizen voice that recognizes the legitimate interests of other groups (including opponents), creates a sense of common ownership and action, and acknowledges the need for difficult trade-offs. And one of the central arguments for deliberative democratic theory is that the process of deliberation itself is a key source for legitimacy. Thus deliberative democracy can be viewed as a tool for promoting public participation, which as mentioned earlier, is also embedded in the concept of NGOs. Thus it can be said that deliberative democracy also promotes development of NGOs. However, this form of public participation can yet be criticised, particularly for its vulnerability to problems of power and domination inside deliberative arenas, for weakness of the system due to the influence of external actors and institutional contexts that may impose severe limitations on the scope of deliberative decision and action. Also in the atmosphere of social apathy practicing deliberative democracy can require unrealistically high levels of participation.

Following the chain of discussion about different concepts used in the current work one may see that deliberative democracy, NGOs and SD are linked by the concept of Human Rights. In fact, the latest may provide a unique framework that links together the mentioned concepts into one mechanism that works on enabling SD in CTs. How this mechanism functions is observed below in the following section.

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26 Here and after: HR
IV. Framework for linking together Sustainable Development, Human Rights and NGOs in the countries in transition

Diagram presented below is used to illustrate the HR framework and relations between its components.

**Figure 1: Human Rights Framework**

![Human Rights Framework Diagram]

Human Rights have different aspects of addressing human needs and development. In the context of the current paper Human Rights are addressed in the light of the three generations of Human Rights. However, the accent is on the 3rd Generation of Human Rights as it focuses on the need for equally addressing human rights to development and healthy environment. The study of the SD concept provided earlier demonstrated that SD is not to be achieved unless socio-economical and environmental aspects incorporated in it are balanced against each other. The question rises then: what can serve the ground for making development and environmental protection compatible in order to achieve SD? Much depends on how SD concept is understood. As stated earlier, it can be seen as “a process of socio-economic reforms based on the increased public participation that targets fulfillment of Human Rights, and first of all right to development”. This interpretation means that SD is first of all about sustainable human development, which in its turn aims to “expand choices for all people—women, men and children, current and future generations while protecting the natural systems on which all life depends”. Thus sustainable human development puts people at the centre, and views humans as both a means and an end of development. Nonetheless, sustainable human development would hardly become possible if there were no rules of law and equity; if ethnic, religious or sexual discrimination were spreading; if there were restrictions on freedoms of speech, free association and the media; and if large numbers of people lived in abject and degrading poverty. This means that all 3 Generations of HR are important and are equally to be fulfilled in order to provide for sustainable human development and SD of human societies respectively.

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27 To remind the reader: In the current, previous and following chapters term “NGO” is used to refer to environmental non-profit NGOs

28 Appendix 3: Human Rights Glossary- Civil and political Rights; Economic, Social, Cultural Rights; Environmental, Cultural, and Developmental Rights on http://www.hrusa.org/hrh-and-n/Part-5/6_glossary.htm Page last updated - data not available. Page first accessed on 05/12/2001 from Lund University, Sweden

29 See supra pp. 10-11

30 See supra p. 11

While earlier this work highlighted major relations between concepts of NGOs, SD and deliberative democracy, it focused on the relations between SD, public participation and NGOs, deliberative democracy, public participation and NGOs. However, the presented HR framework stresses the idea that SD is achieved through fulfilment HR that can be in its turn promoted through active participation of NGOs. Thus it is important to observe the relationship between NGOs, HR, and SD as elements within one framework. As a relationship between NGOs and deliberative democracy that may create preconditions for the development and strengthening of public participation and NGO respectively has already been observed as did the relationship between the HR and SD, at this point the remaining link between HR and NGOs is to be studies. From the very beginning the question rises: how environmental NGOs can contribute to promotion of HR? The answer comes easily as we take a look at the activities carried out by these NGOs. As they engage themselves into activities aimed at environmental protection and nature preservation, promotion of SD on both local community and international levels they directly or indirectly contribute to promotion of HR. Although environmental NGOs may limit their field of activities for example to very small local levels of natural habitat protection, they still contribute to promotion of HR by means of struggling for healthy environment and thus defending right of human communities to live in sound environmental conditions.

On the other hand, the extent to which HR will be promoted and fulfilled first of all depends on the government policy. Today HR conception serves as guideline for developing national legislations in many CTs. In the context of creating NGO movements freedom of speech, freedom of self-expression, freedom of association and assembly became vital legal preconditions reflected in national legislations of these countries for the development of NGO sectors. Nonetheless, HR are still far from being actively embraced in the practices and policies of the states in CTs. The following can be highlighted as general areas where HR principles are yet to be stressed:

   - The judiciary systems, which is subject to political pressure and do not enforce constitutional protections effectively;
   - Press freedom, which is often abused;
   - Legislation regarding the NGO sector development that today is expressed through arduous registration requirements thus hindering freedom of association;
   - Freedom of religion as today there are cages of prohibition against proselytizing by religions other than native;
   - Freedom of movements that in some CTs is being restricted;
   - Rights of women, children, the disabled, and minorities that often are violated.

However, the current work does not explore instruments and strategies that should be designed and implemented on the state level for the promotion of HR in CTs due to the focus of the work on nongovernmental actors, in this case NGOs.

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32 See supra pp. 10-12
33 See supra p. 12
34 Article 19: Universal Declaration on Human Rights, adopted by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948
35 Ibid: Article 20
The development of NGOs in its turn it tied to number of external factors other than government policies that are yet important for considering development and integration of NGOs in the CTs. These are:

I. Public opinion
Another important factor, which impacts the NGO sector is public opinion, which depends first of all on the extent to which public accepts and trusts NGOs as messengers of their word to the states. While NGOs are democratic structures well integrated into western societies, they are a relatively new stream of democratic participation that appears today in the CTs. Even though NGO concept is not entirely new paradigm in CTs, it faded away during the years of communist regime. During that time it was replaced by government patronaged organisations that were used as propaganda tool for supporting the idea of communism and in many cases implied mandatory participation. Thus the feature of public participation, which is incorporated in the idea about NGO structures, was lost. Also times of the communist rule are associated with the atmosphere of suspicion that was created due to the government policy of gathering information of subversive nature from citizens thus encouraging them to spy on neighbour in order to earn favour with local political authorities by sharing information. Such policy resulted in creating suspicious and mistrusting public perception towards forms of free public participation. Today NGOs have to fight for the public trust that was lost during years of communist regime and restore positive opinion, which is not an easy task to perform and requires some time since public attitude does not change with a finger-snap.

II. Public attitude towards government
Another factor that hinders public from accepting NGOs is tied to the heritage of the economy control under communist regime. This factor is public vision of government that is seen as the key actor in society, which addresses their needs and has power for changes and provision of social services and the idea of free public participation based on voluntary bases is still odd in CTs and not accepted by many in these societies.

A more detailed study of the NGO activities that make them equally appreciated and integrated members of developing societies in CTs and contribute to the process of SD and respectively enabling environment is provided in the following chapter.

2. NGOs qua “agents of change” acting for sustainable development in countries in transition

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38 Benevolent organisations and unions as well as culture of philanthropy were well developed here before and even during first decade of the communist regime. According to statistical data, in the year of 1910 there were 4762 charity societies and 6278 charity institutions in Russia. Only 25% of the whole charity budget belonged to the state treasury, zemstvo (territorial division in Imperial Russia), cities and estate establishments, and 75% were the funds of private charity. Based on the facts presented in the Article “Charity Phenomenon” by Fedor Stupak, Kyiv, Ukraine on http://www.histomed.kiev.ua/agapit/ag56/ag56-46c.html. Page last updated: data unavailable. First accessed on 30/10/2001 from Lund University, Sweden
40 Ibid
41 Ibid: Voluntarism Faces Attitudinal Challenges
As mentioned earlier\textsuperscript{42}, countries in transition include all Eastern European countries that have been allies with the Soviet Union and shared to large extent common history until the collapse of Soviet Union in December 1991\textsuperscript{43}.

After the fall of Soviet Union mentioned regions entered the phase of intense political, social and economical reforms; the reason why they are described today as CTs\textsuperscript{44}. However, democratic reforms and changes touched not only social and economical sectors. The NGO sector that can be observed as bridge connecting economical and social layers of society also celebrated revival after some 40 years of staying in the shadow of communist propaganda. The NGO sector has nevertheless long history of existence in the CTs. Before communist regime was established in these regions, philanthropic culture was well spread in the Eastern and Central Europe. However, during the communist rule most NGOs including environmental NGOs lost their legitimacy and only a few number of soviet government oriented NGOs was allowed to operate while being tools of communist ideological propaganda. Today reviving environmental and other NGOs are accepted “agents” of democratic reforms and are seen as important source for addressing social and economic needs during the reconstruction processes in the CTs. Nevertheless, the structuring of NGOs and their activities should not be based only on international experiences and practices; it also must account for regional traditional cultural values and respond to the national needs of society that vary from country to country.\textsuperscript{45}

It can be said that particularly environmental NGOs that are developing in TRs have much in common including relatively same problems, challenges and opportunities due to shared past of the communist ideology. At the same time differences amongst them are based on the diverse cultural and traditional heritage providing for rich palette of environmental NGOs throughout the CTs.\textsuperscript{46} However, they do become active “agents of change” for SD via set of activities designed for development of local communities and embracing different aspects of SD that include advocating for the environmental issues during political decision-making processes, promoting green education, enforcing democracy, improving communication and cooperation networks.

The following subchapters serve to demonstrate how environmental NGO activities impact local communities in transition regions.

\section*{2.1. Green Advocacy}

Advocating for environment is the key role, played by different NGOs worldwide. NGOs of very diverse profile from purely environmental to indirectly addressing environmental issues are engaged in the process of lobbying for environment and influencing political decision making processes to deal with environmental problems and urgent issues.

\textsuperscript{42} See supra p. 7: Introduction, 1.1. Overall rationale of the work
\textsuperscript{43} Map - Collapse of the Soviet Union on \url{http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/ussrfall.htm}
\textsuperscript{44} In the sense of transition from totalitarian communist regime towards open democratic societies
\textsuperscript{45} Article by Randall J. Davis: \textit{The Rebirth of the Nonprofit Sector in Post-communist Eastern Europe: Summary: Challenges Mean Opportunities}, Center for Civil Society International, on \url{http://www.friends-partners.org/ccsi/resource/enoprf.htm}. Page last updated on 06/05/96. First accessed on 05/09/2001 from Lund University, Sweden
\textsuperscript{46} Ian Bell, 1993, Country Profiles and Similarities and Differences: \textit{Eastern and Central Europe and South Africa}, \textit{Introduction}, p. 37 in Ann McKinstry Micou’s and Birgit Lindsnaes’ \textit{The role of voluntary organisations in emerging democracies}, 1993, The Danish Centre for Human Rights, Denmark
Advocating for environment may include diverse actions depending on the status of particular NGO and its principles:

- Direct actions ranging from non-violent to violent aimed at attracting public and media attention urgent issues;
- Demonstrations and marches to keep public aware of ongoing environmental problems;
- Mass media approach to attract attention of important media channels to current environmental issues;
- Boycotts of particular products to draw attention to manufacturer’s mismanagement;
- Court suits and complaints regarding malpractices of official procedures;
- Mailing letters and petitions to those official bodies that have power to influence political decisions addressing environmental issues;
- Scientific research and reporting in order to provide reliability for statements;
- Official lobbying by means of having own representatives in state bodies and institutions;
- Unofficial lobbying by means of transferring personnel to government structures and maintaining connections with those in power.

As a result of such diversity of possible actions NGOs succeed to become real “agents of change” that are the most successful in their efforts for advocating for environment by keeping wide access to public opinion and influencing official decision making processes. However, mission of advocating for environment can be subdivided into separate strategies that together enable NGOs to take firm stand for defending environmental values and effectively perform as “agents of change”.

2.1.1. Promoting green education and creating training frameworks

SD is also about promoting education to guarantee spread of environmental knowledge within and outside the NGO structures. This “investment” in knowledge is very important from the strategic point of view since it aims at creating well educated and informed personnel that will be able to share results of their research and knowledge with the organisation members and public.

In fact, advocating for environment won’t be possible if NGOs didn’t involve scientific research and didn’t employ skilled and educated professionals who provide for credibility of greens’

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48 REC (The Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe), Training for NGOs: The REC’s Capacity Building Programme at http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/NGO_Support/Training.html. Page last updated: data unavailable. First accessed on 05/09/2001 from Lund University, Sweden
Thus, scientific research and training are needed in order to provide high level of expertise when dealing with environmental problems both on national and international levels. Under such policy NGOs try to attract famous scientists and researchers and involve them into organisation and launch trainings to guarantee the diffusion of knowledge within the organisation members and employed staff. All in all, such policy assures that NGOs are able to provide quality services to public and official structures based on scientific expertise and rich knowledge base.

I. **Thematic Case Study 1: Successful promotion of green education in Russia by Russian branch of “Worldwide Fund for Nature”**

Today the WWF is the biggest international NGO in the field of preservation and protection of natural resources. It unites 27 national WWF branches worldwide and has some 5 million registered members.

The regional Russian branch of WWF was started in 1994 and it has already invested more than 12 millions USD in the nature protection and reservation projects in the country. At present the organisation runs more that 50 projects in 35 regions of Russian Federation.

Main directions of WWF work in Russia include:

- Creation and maintenance of unique system of specially protected natural habitats in the country; With the help of WWF the total area of Russian preserves increased up to 25% and double increased in the Arctic region;

- Protection of rare animal and flora species;

- Development of practices to reach “balance of interests” of human population and the environment; Under this directive during the period of 1994-2000 the programmes for sustainable nature resource exploration were developed for the regions of Kalmikia, Kamchatka and republic of Komi;

- Development of the programme for forest conservation and sustainable forest resource use; Under this programme around 10% of each existing kind of forests will be put under protection; Non-protected territories will be managed according to the sustainable forest use programme through the mechanism of independent certification;

- Support to the education programmes about nature conservation, aimed at demonstrating links between human everyday activities and interests and the environment.

Amongst the results that were achieved during 6 years of the WWF work in Russia are creations of eco-education centres “Zapovedniki”, “Bryanskiy Les”, “Lenskiye Stolbi” in Ussuriysk’s preserve and “Nalichevo” National Park. Also WWF forced the adoption of the law that regulates the trade of rare animal and flora species in the Moscow region.

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50 Here and after WWF
52 Ibid: “O nashey organizacii” (About Our Organisation)
“Zapovedniki” was established in the year of 1996 within the frame of Environmental Education and Public Awareness Program as a public NGO. The goal of the organisation is to raise public awareness about environmental issues especially protection of nature and role of the nature as major means for protecting Russia’s rich biodiversity. The centre “Zapovedniki” (Preserves, rus.) became a coordinating body that unites professionals from preserves and national parks who dedicate themselves to supporting protection of nature in Russia. “Zapovedniki” coordinates work of WWF branches in Russia including Moscow branch and 30 regional branches that launch environmental education programmes on local level. The need of nature education centres is dictated by the fact that Russia has a rich variety of natural preserves and national parks that are not only means for protecting Russia’s nature but also rich field for conducting scientific researches and enriching environmental education base.53

Since “Zapovedniki” has the unique mission of developing public appreciation for nature protection in Russia, it uses education activities and information diffusion as the main tools to increase public awareness about importance of preserving and protecting Russia’s natural resources. Under this mission the centre:

- Launches thematic seminars, trainings and workshops and conferences aimed at increasing proficiency of specialists working in its structures and programmes; “Zapovedniki” organised number of regional seminars on Local people and Protected Areas starting year 1997 conducted in Republic of Bashkortostan that were dedicated to the Role of State Environmental Bodies in the Formation of Public Support of PA (Protected Areas)

- Supports environmental education and informs public by means of publishing promotional and informative material about Russia’s protected areas and endangered species that is distributed to interest groups, educational institutions and NGOs that love nature and take interest in Protected Areas

- Supplies the state with periodical material regarding environmental issues; For example, starting from July 1997 “Zapovedniki” together with “Smolenskoye Po'ozerye” national park, began publishing and distributing a monthly newspaper, “Zapovedniye Ostrova” (Protected Islands) that is periodically distributed free of charge to the State Duma (Russian Parliament), Government, Council of Russian Federation, ministerial bodies and regional committees for environmental protection

- Develops network of its regional branches for better coordination and information exchange within WWF network

- Dedicates itself to developing partnership with NGOs and individuals interested it further improvement of the Russia’s system of preserves as on the other hand it gives opportunity to exchange experiences, share skills and enrich information and education base of the centre

53 Welcome to Zapovedniks on http://www.zapovedniks.ru/. Page last updated on 01.06.1999. First accessed on 27/09/2001 from Lund University, Sweden
54 Ibid: “Mission statement”
55 Welcome to Zapovedniks on http://www.zapovedniks.ru/. Page last updated on 01.06.1999. First accessed on 27/09/2001 from Lund University, Sweden
56 Ibid: “Publications”
57 Ibid: “Publications”
58 Ibid: “Cooperation”
and its partners; “Zapovedniki” cooperates both with Russian partners including The State Committee of the Russian Federation on Environmental Protection, The Division of National Park Management of Rosleshoz (Forestry Service of the Russian Federation), The Commission for Nature Protection, as well as with its international partners such as the WWF, World Conservation Union, World Commission on Protected Areas59, The Centre for Russian Nature Conservation, Fund for Nature and National Parks of Europe60 and many other NGOs that are also contributing to protection of natural areas61;

➢ Organises cultural activities and other events in order to promote public awareness about the significance of protecting nature while actively cooperating with mass media; For example, “Zapovedniki” organizes and promotes meetings and festivals dedicated to Protected Areas and take part in other cultural events like "Celebration 80th Anniversary of Russian Preserves"62.

The successful work of “Zapovedniki” centre demonstrates that promotion of green education is a powerful tool that helps to integrate the values of preserving and caring for nature through all levels of society that on a long run contributes to development of overall social appreciation and understanding of links between social well-being and environment.

2.1.2. Enforcing democratic practices

As mentioned in the fourth chapter of the current paper NGOs play active role in the transition processes from communist regime to democracy. While democracy itself is precondition for the existence of NGOs and their successful performance, NGOs at their turn contribute to development of democracy and fusion of this concept throughout societies in the CTs. Policy of becoming “Pressure group”63 makes NGOs the most influencing movement that impacts public opinion regarding urgent and ongoing environmental issues and affects political decision-making process. In fact, advocating for environment is the mission of NGOs that embodies practical steps for enabling mechanism of public participation. Thus it can be said that NGOs become the vital element that gives public opinion bigger weight; share in political decision-making processes regarding environmental issues and enforces democratic participation on behalf of society.

II. Thematic Case Study 2: Facilitation of public participation by “ECOLOGIA” NGO in Lithuania

“Ecologists for Organising Grassroots Initiatives and Action”64 is an international NGO founded in 1989 that historically has American roots and is dedicated to addressing and solving environmental problems on levels from local to global. Today it has regional offices also in the regions that are undergoing social and economical transition processes. The organisation’s policy is based on believe that development of public participation and community decision-making skills is essential to successful creation, maintenance and further strengthening of environmental movements. The

59 Here and after: WCPA
60 Here and after: FNNPE
61 Ibid: “Cooperation”
62 Ibid: “Public activities”
64 Here and after: ECOLOGIA
The promotion of environmental public participation is a powerful democratic tool that gives residents ultimate opportunity to improve their communities.

The project “Nuclear Communities in transition” is one of the brightest examples of successful work of the NGO in the field of promoting public participation in decision-making processes regarding issues of improving conditions in the Nuclear power sector. Launched in the year of 1999, the project was designed to promote local public participation in resolving important issues of nuclear power sectors in Russia and Lithuania. On general level, the project included such basic activities as providing citizens of both regions with up-to-date scientific and legal information covering nuclear power sector issues and launching training sessions for resident groups about effective ways of public participation. All in all, educated public participation would lead to decision-making processes regarding nuclear power that would be based on diversity of richer knowledge and information base, and thus would reinforce democratic practices on local community level.

On its way towards reconstruction of its energy sector that would meet the European Union standards Lithuania faces number of difficulties first of all associated with an energy grid set up during Soviet regime, and the operation of a Soviet-constructed nuclear power plant. Since the plant doesn’t meet safety standards approved by the EU, the country has agreed to shut down the reactor.

Located in a dejected part of Lithuania, the Ignalina power plant is the main provider of jobs for the town of Visaginas. In the region, this factor creates a strong opposition to the plans of shutting down the plant. Ignalina is going to be amongst the first decommissioning to take place in the Eastern Europe. However, it will directly affect social and economical life of the region in which the plant is situated. In fact, the issue of decommissioning Ignalina nuclear power plant, is not only internal issue to be solved in Lithuania; depending on how well the country will manage to fight negative effects of the plant’s decommissioning including increased unemployment, economic recession and social tension, it will set the example of facing and dealing with the problems associated with shutting down non-safe nuclear plants on the territory of the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe.

As a response to need of dealing with negative effects of decommissioning, “ECOLOGIA” developed a project “Nuclear Communities in Transition” that targets groups of residents and NGOs located in the vicinity of nuclear power plants situated on the territory of the Former Soviet Union, in particular in Russia, Lithuania, and Belarus and aims at helping these communities turn from nuclear into non-nuclear sustainable communities. The work of the NGO in Visaginas, town

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66 Here and after: EU


69 Definition - The shutdown and dismantling of a nuclear reactor at the end of its useful life, in accordance with carefully controlled procedures for recovering usable fuel and components, decontaminating the site and equipment, and implementing long-term security measures to prevent unauthorized access and exposure; *Harcourt: AP Dictionary of Science and Technology* on [http://www.harcourt.com/dictionary/](http://www.harcourt.com/dictionary/). First accessed from Lund University on 05/10/2001
located in the vicinity of Ignalina power plant, is first of all about addressing the social problems linked to decommissioning processes so that the community can successfully deal with the consequences of Ignalina’s shut down.

At present “ECOLOGIA” focuses on the following aspects of working with Visaginas community:

- Assisting in creating programmes for SD of the community and implementation of Local Agenda 21 with the emphasis on active public participation in decision-making processes regarding creation of environmentally and economically SD policies; Since Ignalina decommissioning project is the first experimental project in the field of dismantling nuclear power plants to take place in Russia, Lithuania and Belarus, “ECOLOGIA” also involved in its work professional staff from its regional offices in Russia and Belarus who have been working in Visaginas with the local and Belarusian officials, NGOs, business representatives and trade union members brought together to share experience and advices while creating exact plans for the future of the town without Ignalina plant;

- Making NGOs grow stronger in Visaginas; under this policy “ECOLOGIA” holds up training workshops and sessions about ways to strengthen local NGOs in order to become more successfully involved in Local Agenda 21 on decision-making and practical levels. It also shares useful information regarding aspects of cooperation with local officials and other NGOs;70;

- Promoting cooperation between major decision-making groups in Visaginas: at this stage “ECOLOGIA” aims at creating more active dialog between decision makers by means of bringing them together for participatory decision-making at round table meetings. Since there are organisations involved at providing help to Visaginas residents, the roundtables are conducted also for the purpose of better coordination between helping organisations and for sharing plans of their work in Visaginas. Amongst such activities was a conference launched in February 2001 in Visaginas and sponsored by “ECOLOGIA”; it was dedicated to informing local NGOs about Ignalina decommissioning plans and to demonstrate role they (NGOs) can play in decision-making processes that are tied to the future of Visaginas community;

- Share expertise with local decision-making structures in Visaginas: based on the needs of the local community and NGOs, “ECOLOGIA” professional staff provides them with information and scientific data in comprehensible and easy to use form. Such activities include, for example, providing information about Local Agenda 21 in Russian language, since more than two thirds of Visaginas population don’t understand Lithuanian, that is attained from Belarusian and Russian NGOs and experts that are helping “ECOLOGIA” and local NGOs in their work with the community.

In coming years “ECOLOGIA” will continue its activities aimed at improving SD planning for the region and empowering local NGOs and decision-making bodies to deal with social and economical consequences of Ignalina nuclear power plant decommissioning. Continuing support of

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“ECOLOGIA”, participating local NGOs and authorities will ensure safe and more or less smooth transformation of Visaginas towards sustainable non-nuclear community in the future.

2.1.3. Improving social communication via cooperation networking

The ability of NGOs to react fast and adequately to urgent environmental needs and organise activities to respond to these needs depends on the level of information flow and exchange in and outside the NGO.

Since maintaining sound communication level between NGOs and public is very important for having access to public opinion, networking between NGOs and their partners becomes an important strategic tool. It contributes to NGO work in several ways:

- Linking NGOs together for cooperation; Networks unite different NGOs helping them to coordinate their actions and achieve better results of partnership work, facilitating consensus achievement regarding basic laws, constitution and administrative regulations vital for setting legal frames of NGO activities;

- Setting stage for forum: this mission of networks is about bringing NGOs together for the discussion of urgent environmental issues in the communities where NGOs operate. Voting for decisions regarding large scale issues like developing NGO policy on certain environmental issue and developing plan for working with socially vulnerable groups and addressing community needs calls for networks to ensure effective voice contribution to the decision-making process;

- Facilitating information exchange and solidarity; at this stage networks help unite NGOs based on their common interest regarding environment and problems they have to deal with via sharing information and showing solidarity and support;

- Optimising response time: networks help NGOs to have instant access to information regarding urgent issues and enable NGOs to react fast and adequately to them. The faster NGOs exchange information and send alerts regarding environmental problems the shorter is their response time for dealing with stress;

- Giving access to new information technologies: since the work of NGOs to high extent depends on information flows, proper information technologies become vital to NGOs. Thus keeping each other updated on new information technologies and helping each other to attain those technological means helps NGOs to share information and generate information flows in and out organization;

- Accessing funding sources; this is about networks set up by donor organisations that are accessed by NGOs searching funding for their projects. The better network is developed, the easier and wider access it has to funding sources and information about them.

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III. Thematic Case Study 3: Establishment of communication network for Armenian NGOs by the NGO Centre, Yerevan, Armenia

The “NGO Training and Resource Center” have been set up by the Armenian Assembly of America in 1994 with the purpose to serve the public and Armenian NGOs as they work on constructing the basic pillars of the democratic society in the country. NGOs that are active in the country and involve in vast variety of activities including serving vulnerable social groups, and advocating for human rights and environmental issues are viewed today as the major “agents of change” for developing and empowering civil society.

Today the “NGOTRC” continues its activities aimed at providing assistance to Armenian NGOs that are acting to make positive contribution to social, political and economical transition reforms in Armenia. It serves as the main coordinating, funding and informative center for Armenian NGOs that offers trainings, media and electronic communication network, small grant programmes, technical assistance, information and research, legal expertise and partnership development assistance. It publishes media periodicals also available in electronic format and promotes communication between different stakeholder groups including NGOs, mass media, business sector and government through its Dialogue Programme. The importance of “NGOTRC” continues to be evident and actual since NGO sector of Armenian society is in active development phase with more and more NGOs being created and more programmes being developed to address needs of Armenian society. “NGOTRC” is unique in its role of fund provider since lack of adequate financial resources in probably the most common problem that Armenian NGOs have to face from the very first day of their creation.

Grants provided by the “NGOTRC” have given Armenian NGOs possibility to revive their role in the society and to start providing their help to communities on local level. Armenian NGOs involve in such activities as:

- Helping to rebuild and strengthen communities that still suffer consequences of 1988 devastating earthquake;
- Providing legal support during election and law drafting processes;
- Lobbying for and advocating for environment, human rights and, particularly refugee rights;
- Caring for orphans and socially vulnerable groups (refugees, handicaps, elderly people);
- Defending consumer rights;
- Developing medical care programmes.

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72 William D. Carmichael, 1993, Networking and follow-up activities, Synthesis, p. 165-164 in Ann McKinstry Micou’s and Birgit Lindsnaes’ The role of voluntary organisations in emerging democracies, 1993, The Danish Centre for Human Rights, Denmark
73 Here and after: NGOTRC
Amongst projects launched under supervision of “NGOTRC” is the regional project launched by the Danish Refugee Council in Armenia. It targets the socially vulnerable groups of refugees that are a big issue today in Armenian society that lacks resources to help refugees integrate in and resettle in the society. The project deserves the attention due to its goal of creating network of local NGOs working with refugees, internally displaced people and groups that live under refugee conditions. Armenian refugees are a part of the overall project launched by the DRC in Caucasus. It was initiated by the conference held in Baku in March 2001: “The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations: From Refugee to Durable Solutions in the Caucasus - Constraints, Dilemmas and Possibilities” that was organised to emphasise the positive role of NGOs in solving refugees’ essential problems, and perspectives of peace and stability in the Caucasus region.

“NGOTRC” became the fostering organisation of the DRC project in Armenia with the focus on the following activities:

- Contributing to development of a Caucasian regional NGO network in order to strengthen the partnership between the participating NGOs in the country and between other Caucasian states. So that the latest will be able to lobby governments, have fast and adequate responses to emergency situations, to involve in rehabilitation of refugees and country development processes and to support peace and stability in Caucasian region;

- Offering small project funding on national levels in order to support the work of NGOs, develop and support cooperation within and between the Newly Independent States initiative groups of conference on Migration and increase information exchange on refugee and internally displaced persons issues;

- Increasing and promoting the exchange of information and expertise between NGOs.

All in all, it can be said that “NGOTRC” started in 1994 became today the major coordinating joint and information provider for the Armenian NGOs that successfully provides its services to different stakeholder groups through its developed NGO network. At the same time, the extent of successfullness of the NGOC work directly depends on the information flow through, in and out the organisation, which in its turn is the result of well functioning and developing NGO network in the country.

2.2. Summing up: NGOs as agents of strategic change

While NGO structures develop as a result of democratisation process taking place in the CTs, they in their turn become active facilitators of sustainable improvement and development by means of reaching to public and expressing public opinion in political decision-making processes. Thus they bring element of public participation into the issues and solutions concerned with the development processes and environment therefore creating and stimulating diversity of opinions. Such strategy describes the best mission of advocating for the environment and enables NGOs to gain more public support and trust when performing as “agents of change”. It also stimulates NGOs to maintain high level of knowledge and scientific expertise in order to share it with the public and provide advisory services to the official states. NGO activities like promoting green education and organising...
trainings to maintain solid professional knowledge levels amongst organisation staff and many other practices are amongst activities that help NGO to attract more public into NGO activities, make it known to public and create the organisation image. This builds up public attitude about the work of NGO and positive public attitude and support, helps NGOs integrate into society and become a communication bridge that transforms public opinion to political decision-making processes.

Moving from more general to more specific level, the following chapter will focus on more detailed case study that aims at taking a closer look on impacts that a particular NGO project can create in the local community of one of the CTs.

3. “Striving towards sustainability of Vardenis community”: Central case study of the “Vardenis” YMCA project, Armenia

This part of the thesis is dedicated to conducting central case study of the project aimed at creating local branch of YMCA NGO in Vardenis region of Armenia. The work within the current chapter is performed in the following way: first, a short historical background is provided to make the reader familiar with the Vardenis community where local YMCA branch was planned to get started and the historical roots of the YMCA in Armenia. Then the common goals and activities of the project are presented. At this stage the project is observed with the study of major goals, organisational structure of planned NGO, activities, main challenges and opportunities the created NGO has to face during the projects’ implementation in the community. The study concludes with giving some recommendations regarding possible improvements in the NGO’s work with the community.

3.1. Historical background of the “Vardenis” YMCA project

The history of the establishment of the YMCA NGO in the community of Vardenis is tightly connected with the history of the country since the year of 1988. This year became “a black spot” for Armenia when devastating earthquake followed by the outbreak of war over Artcakh78 enclave with the neighbouring country of Azerbaijan threw the country into long-lasting swirl of political and humanitarian crisis. Additionally “sealed” by the economic blockade from Azerbaijan and external road blockade as a result of territorial conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia autonomy, Armenia was cut off the rest of the world and facing numerous problems of refugees, communities devastated by the earthquake or destructed by war, and deep economic recession resulted from overall blockade and political destabilisation. The country desperately needed immense external support from the world community to survive these hard times. At this stage large number of international NGOs from all over the world showed their support to Armenia by bringing some relief to the country. YMCA was amongst NGOs that joined the international assistance movement in Armenia and started number of relief programmes in different regions of Armenia, particularly in the earthquake struck zone and in the communities where refugees were placed79.

Vardenis, the town situated east of Armenia (165 km. From the capital city, Yerevan) and southeast of the Sevan lakeshore is one of those Armenian communities that suffer heavy consequences of the war with Azerbaijan, particularly from the significant influx of refugees and poor economic

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78 The native Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh
79 Organisation assessment and strategic plan: Strategic plan, Environmental scan, pg.9 submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001
conditions. Since the war erupted the public services infrastructure including public education and health services has been falling apart gradually raising unemployment rates (at present unemployment rate is about 80%\textsuperscript{80}). The crisis deepened due to poor geopolitical location of the community (frontier line) that lead to lack of economic investments in the region leaving the local government with no money to maintain weakened infrastructure and perform as the main financer of the municipal government\textsuperscript{81}.

Another problem that the Vardenis community had to face as the result of the worsened economic conditions was a loss of hope for the better future of the community and resulting outflow of its inhabitants who moved to the capital in search of earnings. This increasingly lead to decline of the population and first of all young people who seek better fortune in the capital of the country or even abroad. According to official statistical data, total population of the Vardenis region including the town was reported to be about 18,000 while it is estimated that at present in has declined to 10,000 due to outflow of the population\textsuperscript{82}.

Thus the initial factor that lead to the vulnerability of the community was the war that in its turn resulted in deepened economic crisis with high unemployment rates, problems of abandoned refugees, increasing population migration and fading hopes for the future of the community.

3.1.1. Creation of Vardenis YMCA: A solution for addressing needs of the local community youth

As mentioned earlier YMCA was amongst those international NGOs that spread a helping hand to vulnerable Armenian communities. Proclaimed as early as in 1855 on the First Conference of YMCA held in Paris\textsuperscript{83}, the organisation mostly known today as World Alliance of YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Associations) consists of local associations within their countries and counts for 122 countries with some 45,000,000 members round the world. Although the organisation was initially established on the religious values of Christianity, today it can be identified as environmental NGO as it addresses issues of human development in the communities worldwide.

In Armenia YMCA became one of the major partners of the UN projects that were developed for the regions that are still in recovery phase after the devastating earthquake of the year of 1988 and communities ravaged by conflict as well as participated in the programmes that target the most vulnerable groups of society that also involve children: orphans, refugees and street youth (Auth.).

As previously said, Vardenis region is listed today as one of the most vulnerable communities in Armenia that needs assistance in rebuilding and maintaining healthy and vital environment.

\textsuperscript{80} The Young Men’s Christian Association of Vardenis-Final Report for 1998: Narrative part, Background, pg.1, reported by Vardan Hambardzumyan, President, Vardenis YMCA on December 26, 1998

\textsuperscript{81} Organisation assessment and strategic plan: Strategic plan, Environmental scan, pg.9 submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid

In response to the community’s problems since the year of 1994 the United Nations High Commission for Refugees\textsuperscript{84} and the Norwegian Refugee Council\textsuperscript{85} had developed number of relief programmes for Vardenis region in which YMCA of Armenia took active part. Since the participation in relief programmes the idea of creating a local YMCA here emerged and has been developed by Armenian YMCA that started searching for the partners who could cooperate with the Armenian side in the project for creating the Vardenis YMCA. Thus participation in relief programmes developed by UNHCR and NRC became an initial step leading to idea of creating local YMCA in this region that would assist the community and help it sustain itself in the future. This idea initially belongs to Vardan Hambardzumyan, currently the President of Vardenis YMCA, Johan Vilhelm Eltvik, European Alliance of YMCAs\textsuperscript{86} Secretary General and Evan Johanssen, the Secretary of YMCA Sportsalliance of Denmark\textsuperscript{87}. Together they shared a common vision of creating YMCA in Vardenis that would address needs of the community, particularly needs of Vardenis youth and give community hope for better future. The idea grew and in the year of 1996, June at the meeting in Copenhagen Danish side presented the official decision on investing money in the project of creating local YMCA branch in Vardenis as a “platform for revival of the community”\textsuperscript{88}.

3.2. Project “Vardenis”: Striving towards sustaining life of the local community

3.2.1. Goals and objectives of the project

After negotiations and active communication between partner sides that represented YMCA Sportsalliance of Denmark and Armenian YMCA, the local YMCA of Vardenis was established in Vardenis region of Armenia. It was set up as a beneficiary and grant winning project of the Danish YMCA programme called “VERDEN S BØRN”(Children of the World) that was aimed at helping children in the Third World countries. Money contributed to the project were collected by joint efforts of the Danish church and Danish voluntary organizations including YMCA Sportsalliance of Denmark, YMCA Scouts, Young Women’s Christian Association\textsuperscript{89} and Frivilligt Drenge- og Pige-Forbunds\textsuperscript{90}, one of the largest Christian organisations for children and young people in Denmark.

The original goal of the project was to set up a Local YMCA association that would address needs of young generation in the Vardenis region suffering from economical and social crisis resulting in high level of unemployment, illiteracy and poverty and aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- To take care of young people of Vardenis by means of organizing their spare time and helping to develop diverse interests (hobbies)
- To spread the word of democracy through delivering power of decision making to young people and developing their leadership skills

\textsuperscript{84}Here and after: UNHCR
\textsuperscript{85} NRC
\textsuperscript{86} Here and after: EAY
\textsuperscript{87} Also sometimes referred to as Danish YMCA
\textsuperscript{88} From the interview with Evan Johanssen, the Secretary of YMCA Sports of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark
\textsuperscript{89} Here and after: YWCA
\textsuperscript{90} Here and after: FDF
To integrate the NGO into the life of the community and create good communication and partnership traditions between the public and Vardenis YMCA.

In order to achieve the stated goal and objectives it was necessary to create an effective material, institutional and programme framework that would set the base for the establishment of Vardenis YMCA as eligible and credible NGO in the region. To do so Armenian YMCA also attracted number of foreign partner organisations and first of all Danish YMCA that would not only provide financial aid for the successful implementation of the project but also would bring diversity of international experience and culture into the process of creating Vardenis YMCA thus providing broader perspective and richer knowledge about different issues associated with the establishment and development of local NGOs.

3.2.2 Armenian YMCA, Danish Sportsalliance of YMCAs and Danish Church: Creating synergy for handling the “Vardenis” project

The role of Danish church in the creation of Vardenis YMCA was one of the crucial importance since it became the main provider of funding to the project and generated financial base for the Danish YMCA, which in its turn became the major investor into the project.

“As churches struggle to redefine their role in society, they find themselves reaching out to issues concerned with the environment” (Daniel Langenkamp, Preaching from the Green pulpit, 1995, Summer Bulletin, Insight Involvement). The process of transition touches upon all the layers of developing societies including religious movements. It is not a secret that churches have always been involved in charity activities and contributed to development of environmental concerns in Western Europe by means of partnering with environmental experts, funding clean-up and tree planting projects, conducting environmental research and holding conferences on environmental issues. After all, traditional dominance of church in western societies turns them into a powerful tool for influencing public opinion. Thus churches and religious NGOs can serve as active agents in advocating for the environmentally friendly values and SD.

However the success of the church reaching to people and supporting movements striving for SD to high extent depends on the traditional position of the church within society. While created as grass root movements religious NGOs already play active role in the African continent uniting people for taking collective action to improve their communities and care for the environment, the role of church organisations in contributing to SD in the regions of transition is still to be acknowledged by the society.

Due to past communist oppressive regime of the present countries in transition churches were blocked from the society and acting: the reason why they still stay away from being active today. However, step-by-step they are already getting involved in the process of changes towards open

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91 From the interview with Evan Johanssen, the Secretary of YMCA Sports of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark


93 Ibid
democratic societies in the mentioned region while gradually starting to act on the social, economic and human rights issues and on caring for the environment.\textsuperscript{94}

In case of the "Vardenis" project Danish church provided the initial financial aid for the investments on behalf of Danish YMCA that were required on the first place to create technical and material base for the project. Financial support also empowered the Danish YMCAs to provide the project with expert staff that actively involved in organised trainings and shared expertise with future Vardenis YMCA staff and volunteers, as well as invested in real estate (YMCA building) and inventory (sports equipment and YMCA sports outfit).\textsuperscript{95}

This partnership, reflected in the slogan of the project: "Walk together hand in hand", gave Armenian YMCA a number of benefits including:

- Exchange of professional knowledge about issues associated with establishment and further development of local NGOs; in fact, Vardenis YMCA created as outcome of the project became a model for the development of local YMCAs in Central and Eastern Europe;

- Attraction of individuals interested in investing their time, knowledge and skills into development of staff and volunteer human resources of the NGO on the base of various training programmes;

- Investments needed to attain real estate where Vardenis YMCA would place its headquarters and launch programmes, as well as investments into technical means for maintaining information exchange in and out the NGO including computer equipment and internet;

- Investment into sports and other inventory and gear including YMCA outfit needed for the performance of different youth programmes;

- Development of rich cultural background based on the international exchange of culture values between the Armenian and Danish sides, particularly between Vardenis and Danish youth and between professionals from both sides. This was done through different programmes including participation of Armenian side in Danish YMCA camps and involvement of Danish professional YMCA leaders into training programmes in Armenia;

- Promotion of democratic values amongst youth of Vardenis community participating in the project.

However, Danish YMCA and Danish church were not the only partners that supported the project. Amongst other organisations were also Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Culture of Denmark that sponsored the training schedules within the project for both Armenian and Danish sides and the EU that provided the project with the necessary data processing equipment.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{94} Daniel Langenkamp: Preaching from the Green pulpit: CEE churches are now making up for lost time, Summer Bulletin 1995, Insight Involvement on http://www.rec.org/REC/Bulletin/Bull52/Involvement.html. Page last updated: data not available. First accessed on 28/07/2001 from Lund University, Sweden

\textsuperscript{95} From the interview with Evan Johanssen, the Secretary of YMCA Sports of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark

\textsuperscript{96} The Young Men's Christian Association of Vardenis-Final Report for 1998: Narrative part, Background, p.1, reported by Vardan Hambardzumyan, President, Vardenis YMCA on December 26, 1998
Thus partnership and cooperation became an important precondition: a start point from which the project was launched and which created the necessary resource base in terms of technical, material and professional support.

### 3.2.3. Capacity building for Vardenis YMCA: From Local Initiative group to Local NGO

Having created necessary human and material initial base the project moved further towards institutional establishment of YMCA NGO in Vardenis and capacity building. At this stage the project was about bringing together all resources involved in the project (material, technical and human) and creating active framework for the development and implementation of programmes within the project aimed at achieving project’s objectives that were about:

- Taking care of young people by means of providing different programmes to fill their leisure time and develop their personal interests and skills;
- Promoting democracy within the community by means of letting young people take part in decision-making processes and develop their leadership skills;
- Integrating YMCA into the community and developing NGO’s communication network.

Thus capacity building combines both the organisational structure and human resources and sets the effective base for creating development opportunities of the organisation as a whole\(^7\).

#### I. Capacity building-Step 1: Creating organisational structure

Institutional establishment of the organisation was the initial step in the project’s implementation that led to legalisation of the NGO status and allowed it to perform as legal institution in Vardenis. This step implied setting the organisational framework and defining the field where the NGO was to operate and develop its programmes and activities.

**i. Creating organisational framework**

Organisational principal of Vardenis YMCA is based on the democratic, i.e. participatory approach defined as “bottom-up” approach reflected also in its mission that states: “YMCA Vardenis is a constituent part of the YMCA\'s Movement Worldwide. Through its vocation it seeks to serve the needs of the community, especially of children and young people there, by sharing the struggle they face and searching together for positive values and fundamental solutions.”\(^8\)

It is just the opposite of most common “top-to bottom” approach that dominates across business and state official structures and is based on the power of ruling authority. However, “top-to-down” approach wouldn’t be appropriate to implement in NGO structures since it undermines the very participatory principle that serves the base for the development of NGO structure\(^9\).

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\(^7\) Wallace Mgoqi, 1993, Building Institutions in South Africa, *Organisational capacity*, p. 129, paragraph 1 in Ann McKinstry Micou’s and Birgit Lindstrøms’ *The role of voluntary organisations in emerging democracies*, The Danish Centre for Human Rights, Denmark

\(^8\) Vardenis YMCA Mission statement in “YMCA Vardenis Strategic Plan 2001-2005” submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001

“Bottom-up” approach ensures further democratic development of the organisation and personal development of its members. Also it creates the inspiring atmosphere of trust and enthusiasm inside the organisation; all people that work there are individuals devoted to the organisation and their jobs.

The operational structure of the organisation in accordance with the “bottom-up” approach is based on the Board Committee chaired by the Head of the Board of the. The Board carries out official and non-official meetings during the year and is the policy developing body within the structure of the organisation. The members of the Board are usually members of the community that are not employed inside the NGO but may be members of the organisation or take interest in its activities on community level. The re-elections of the Board take place every two years. The first Board was established in 1998 and the next election of its members is planned to take place in 2002.

The Board adopts decisions regarding development strategy and designs programmes for the organisation based on the analysis of the organisation and community’s needs. The needs analysis is thus the initial step that serves the base for the policy and strategy development for the NGO. On the other hand, is the ultimate tool that transfers opinion of the organisation’s members and their needs to the decision making body, the Board. This approach ensures that every member of the organisation gets to practice his/her right to share opinion and vote based on the practice of equal participation in decision-making processes. The Board also carries out decisions regarding hiring and firing working staffs that carry out technical and professional support within the organisation. The Executive director and the Programme Director manage the staffs and are responsible for the financial and administrational matters of the organisation and for the coordination and management of the programmes respectively. However the staff workers are limited in the influence on decision-making processes regarding policy and strategy of the NGO by the borders of their work responsibilities. They are executives that have the power to make decisions regarding only the improvements related to their working conditions within their professional field. Nevertheless, they can make proposals and volunteer for the NGO but they are not included into the Board committee and cannot participate in the Board voting processes.

The members of the organisation mainly include Vardenis community youth, participating in different programmes and NGO activities on the voluntary bases. Members of the organisation also pay a symbolic fee (200 AMD/month/person equal to 0.40 USD) that partly provides for the coverage of the organisation’s expenses. It also must be mentioned that principles of democratic participation based on the respect of Human Rights such as for example gender equality and non-discrimination is being stressed throughout the structure of the organisation and the services it provides to local community. Today number of regular members of the NGO is at 250 while it started up with 70 in the beginning of the project and the number of benefiting participants is up at 500 people (this represents more than 7% of total Vardenis population), while in the beginning it

100 Organisation assessment and strategic plan: Organisational review, Analysis, pg.6 submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001
101 In accordance with the constitution of Vardenis YMCA stating responsibilities of the Head of the Board (paragraph 10), adopted December 18, 1999 signed by the Vardenis YMCA President, Vardan Hambardzumyan
102 In accordance with the constitution of Vardenis YMCA stating responsibilities of the Head of the Board Committee (paragraph 9), adopted December 18, 1999 signed by the Vardenis YMCA President, Vardan Hambardzumyan
103 Ibid: responsibilities of the Administrative staff (paragraph 13)
104 The Young Men’s Christian Association of Vardenis-Final Report for 1998: Narrative part, Institutional development, pg.1, reported by Vardan Hambardzumyan, President, Vardenis YMCA on December 26, 1998
was around 150 participants\textsuperscript{105}. As the project developed it enrolled paid staffs that are today 8 permanent workers managing the administrative and financial matters of the NGO. The organisation also officially holds status of the NGO as the association registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia\textsuperscript{106}.

However, since the initial day of its establishment the organisation still has to work on enforcing its organisational structure. This would include clarifying responsibilities of its Board members and paid staff. Also more precise procedures should be designed in the field of the organisation’s management to ensure faster and more effective work results. Creativity also should be encouraged through all levels of the NGO to support personal input of the staff, members and participants into the organisation’s work\textsuperscript{107}. Nonetheless, more detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities Vardenis YMCA has to deal with is provided in the last chapter of the clinical case study.

\textit{ii. Defining field of the NGO activities}

Vardenis YMCA was initially set up as the project to serve the needs of the local community youth. Thus the field of its work is to engage in the activities designed to provide young generations with possibility of personal development. It mostly serves young people who are preschool and school age ranging from 5 to 18 years old. It provides a number of services including: TenSing (Youth Choir), outdoors sports, education, information technologies and language classes. These services offered by the NGO to community enable families (many of these suffer from poverty) to draw kids back from streets and give them a chance to develop their personal potential, leadership, and sport and art skills\textsuperscript{108}. In other words, Vardenis YMCA today works in the field of developing human potential of the community by means of investing in knowledge and skills of the local youth.

\textit{iii. Round up: Vardenis YMCA institutional framework established}

Having summed up the information presented above, one can say that the project successfully passed the first step of capacity building process, which was about initial institutional establishment of the YMCA NGO in Vardenis. Despite the fact that much still needs to be done to enforce and strengthen the organisational structure of the NGO, the inspiration of the working and volunteer staff in the organisation creates the healthy atmosphere in their work and allows for optimistic forecasts about future of the organisation. Democratic participation in the life of the NGO combined with strong spiritual input sets the base for the further development of the NGO and better work and organisational performance of it in the future.

As the project moved ahead the next and probably the most challenging part in capacity building was about development of the programme framework.

\textit{II. Capacity building-Step 2: Developing programme framework}

Developing programme framework for Vardenis YMCA became probably the most important part of the project. The strategic importance of creating sound programme framework is bound to the

\textsuperscript{105} Combined statistics from The Young Men’s Christian Association of Vardenis-Final Report for 1998: Narrative part, Institutional development, pg.1 and the Organisation assessment and strategic plan: Strategic plan, Background, paragraph 2, submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001

\textsuperscript{106} Here and after: RA

\textsuperscript{107} Organisation assessment and strategic plan: Organisational review, Analysis, pg.6 submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid: Organisational review, S.Programming, pp. 12-13
possibility of further development of the organisation. This in its turn depends on the extent to which the interests and needs of its key stakeholders are addressed. In case of Vardenis project, the extent to which the NGO managed to address the needs of the local community youth through its programmes resulted initially in enrolment of its first members and in increased interest of the local community towards its activities. After the interest towards NGO was initiated, it became very important to maintain it by running continuous programmes that would ensure inflow of members and participants into the organisation. However, the create programmes would not manage to attract attention of the community youth if they did not address the urgent needs of the Vardenis community youth.

As mentioned earlier the project was launched to create local YMCA NGO that would address needs of the youth, which is living these days under big stress directly linked to the problems of poverty, migration and social depression in the community. Lack of parent attention since the latest have to spend most of their time on finding means of living for their families, poor school education due to migration and constant lack of teaching staff, lack of recreational places and opportunities for youth through kids in the streets depriving their right to personal development. Right to personal development as mentioned earlier is the corner stone for creating future human potential for SD. However there can be no future development without humans contributing to it. So the implementation of various continuous programmes within the created programme framework returned to the local youth the right to personal development.

Today Vardenis YMCA runs number of permanent programmes, which are highly appreciated and valued for their good quality on behalf of the community youth. They include:

- Running periodical sport entertaining events
- English club
- TenSing
- Developing Language Reading/Writing techniques
- Developing Life Skills
- Music classes

Based on the understanding the importance of promoting and developing skills of the working staff and volunteering members, Vardenis YMCA also launched number of training programmes since the start of the project. At the initial point of the NGOs establishment training needs analysis pointed that development of leadership and group working skills was crucial for the creation of strong volunteer movement. Thus a whole series of training programmes was designed to fulfil this need. And today the NGO continuous developing its training programmes to target weak points of its performance and use challenges as opportunities for further improvements.

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109 See supra p. 29: 3.1.1. Creation of Vardenis YMCA: A solution for addressing needs of the local community youth
110 See supra p. 13: 1.3.1. Clarification of relevant concepts, Human Rights
112 Ibid: Strategy planning workshop, Draft strategies and objectives: Strategy 6, Objectives, p.16
The increased number of the NGO members and participants enrolled in diverse programmes since the first days of the YMCA work in Vardenis community\textsuperscript{113} indicates that the project managed to develop strong programme framework thus completing the second step of capacity building process. Nonetheless, there is a need to identify and implement tools that would help the NGO to address better the needs of its stakeholders, to create better training framework to assure good level of proficiency amongst staff as well as stronger leadership skills amongst members of the NGO. These and other challenges in the field of developing programme network are observed in more details in the part of the work dedicated to analysis of challenges and opportunities that Vardenis YMCA has deal with.

It must be mentioned at this point that capacity building and to be more precise the creation and maintenance of good programme framework can be achieved only if active communication network is established between the NGO and its key stakeholders. Thus the following step in capacity building is establishing communication network between the Vardenis YMCA and its stakeholders.

III. Capacity building-Step 3: Developing communication network

As manifested in the previous chapters\textsuperscript{114}, development of communication networks between NGOs and their stakeholders enables NGOs to be aware of the community needs, to analyse them and develop programmes to fulfill these needs. And as already mentioned\textsuperscript{115}, it is also important step in capacity building of the Vardenis YMCA to enable NGO to have constant access to information about opinions of its stakeholders and to develop and maintain programme framework that addresses their needs at its best.

Thus the project anticipates also development of the communication network as a part of capacity building of the Vardenis YMCA. The process on establishing communication network is still in progress. Despite Vardenis YMCA actively integrated into the National movement of Armenian YMCAs and became one of the first local associations that founded the National Union of the Armenian YMCAs in December the 16th, 1998\textsuperscript{116}, much of the work is still ahead. The need for creating better communication between the NGO, Vardenis community and the NGO partners is very urgent today. It derives from the aim of the Vardenis YMCA to attract more youth and more partners in its activities.

It can be seen that Vardenis YMCA has to face a lot of challenges in its work that can be traced through all capacity building steps. How the NGO deals with these challenges and what are opportunities and possible solutions for improvements are analyses in the chapter coming up next.

4. Road ahead and lessons to be learned: Challenges and opportunities of the Vardenis YMCA

Having observed the steps of capacity building process of the Vardenis YMCA gradually progressing along the implication of the project, now it is time to sum up the results of these steps and see whether or not they provided for achievement of the project’s initial goals. At this point it

\textsuperscript{113} See supra p. 33: \textit{i. Creating organisational framework}

\textsuperscript{114} See supra p. 24: 2.1.3. Improving social communication via cooperation networking

\textsuperscript{115} See supra p. 35: \textit{Capacity building-Step 2: Developing programme framework for the Vardenis YMCA}

can be said that "yes", the project achieved the stated goals. The Vardenis YMCA was officially established and legalized as NGO under the Ministry of Justice of RA. The institutional framework was developed via creating organizational structure based on the principles of democracy and respect of HR. Supported by the programme framework that was designed to address needs of the community youth, the NGO managed to integrate into community and gain trust and appreciation and credibility for its work. It drew the youth to its activities and gave young ones a chance to develop their personal skills and talents. Having stressed principles of democratic participation through its programs, Vardenis YMCA also gave young generation the power of decision-making and leadership.

Nonetheless, there is a need for further improvements in the work of the NGO aimed at facilitating SD of the local community. As Vardenis YMCA faces some major challenges on its way, it should try to treat them rather as opportunities that can be taken for strengthening its positions and making its work even more efficient. The major and minor challenges obviously appear in all fields of the NGO’s life and development process. However, some of them are of the biggest priority and must be addressed prior to others. They can be subdivided into challenges associated with the development of:

- The organizational framework of the NGO
- The programme framework
- And the communication network.

As one can see, these are the major steps of the capacity building process in the NGO. The extent to which challenges associated with these steps are addressed determines the extent to which performance of the NGO in the community is improved.

4.1. Challenges while setting up organizational framework

Although the organisational framework has been developed prior to other steps of the capacity building process, it still has place for further improvements particularly in the field of the organization’s governance. However, the major challenge in the field of the NGO’s governance is to raise effectiveness of the Board’s and administrative staffs’ performances.

4.1.1. Making work of the Board and the Administrative staff more effective

The first problem that impacts the effectiveness of the Board’s work is due to fact that at present the Board is “under-represented”. All responsibility for carrying out strategic decisions regarding the NGO is left to the Head of the Board and four community members who represent the Board. This is obviously too heavy task to perform for just four people that “does not lead to an efficient or timely way of carrying out the tasks of the Board”\(^{117}\). However the problem of “under-representation” can be solved if the procedures that define how the membership on the Board should be determined and how Board members should be elected are clarified.

Another factor that hinders both the Board members and administrative staff from performing more successfully is indistinctness in the responsibilities division between the two. Thus the problem can be solved by drawing a sharp line between responsibilities of the both while bearing in mind that

\(^{117}\) Organisation assessment and strategic plan: Organisational review, Analysis, pg.6 submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001
the Board’s work is about policy, fundraising and general governance and that the responsibility of the Executive Director is to deal with all operational matters. Another contribution to raising the effectiveness of the Board’s work would be development of tools that would be used as guidelines during processes of strategic planning, supervising and assessing the activities agreed under adopted plans and checking for their compliance with the organization’s mission. For example, policies are observed as important guideline tools that enable the Board and management perform effectively as decision-making bodies. While developing policies, the Board also should always remember to account for interests of the NGO’s main stakeholders in order to carry out effective analysis of their needs and reflect them in developed policies. Thus improvement of policy-making skills amongst Board members and management staff would raise the productiveness of their work. In the light of this need development of Policies and Procedures manual could provide more proficiency and credibility for adopted decisions while serving as major reference source.

However, the work of both the Board and the administration staffs could also be improved through trainings aimed at promoting proficiency skills, which are needed to maintain high quality of the NGO’s programmes. At present, for example, there are trainings carried out for the administration staff as to promote their computer literacy.

Summing up, it can be said that the challenge of making the working performance of the Vardenis NGO more efficient can become the opportunity for the NGO to develop stronger and more efficiently functioning organizational structure if:

- The responsibilities of the Board and Administrative staff are made clear
- The procedures regarding Board elections and functions of its members are straightened
- The tools are developed to raise the effectiveness of the Board in decision-making processes
- Training programs are designed to constantly promote proficiency of the Administrative staff and Board members.

4.2. Challenges while developing programme framework

Despite the Vardenis YMCA actively performs as programme-developer for the community youth and runs number of permanent programmes, it continues to face challenges in the field of programme development and implementation. Challenges that the NGO faces during development of its programme framework have two major aspects: human and funding. Human perspective reflects on the members of the NGO and participants of its programmes, while funding addresses financial matters particularly fundraising for the programmes’ implementation. Both aspects are very important and determine whether or not the NGO will have human and financial resources needed for launching its programmes and achieving goals set for particular programmes. However,
the author finds that the overall priority should be given to the challenge of developing human resources of the NGO: a priority, which is based on belief that human resources are the core of any organisational structure including NGO.

4.2.1. Human resources
Human resources are an important aspect of developed programmes since it includes members of the NGO who perform as implementers, participants or beneficiaries of programmes. Today the following challenges can be identified in this field:

- Continual development of leadership skills amongst members involved in the programs as main performers

- Development of new programs targeting more participants and reaching more needs of the community youth

I. Continual development of leadership skills

As number of members involved in the NGO grows so does the need to promote leadership amongst the new members as well as develop already existing leader skills amongst older generation of its members. Leadership is a tool that enables the NGO members to act as main performers during implementation of certain program when they share their personal skills and knowledge with the programme participants. The promotion of the leadership skills can be done by means of developing sound training framework that would deliver training leader skills and promotion of leadership amongst the NGO members.

However there were some external problems that impacted the process of promoting leadership amongst the NGO members in the initial stage of the programme development. These had to do with the external environment where the youth involved in the NGO live and act. The largest problems in this light had been identifies as the following:

- People, and mainly parents of the kids who joined the project initially view the NGO as a way of generating financial income and material support rather than a way of establishing self-reliance, self-respect and self-esteem for the community based on development of democratic values and spiritual values. At one point such perception on behalf of the community even resulted in disappointment and mistrust as some parents forced their kids to stay away from participating in the project.

In fact, this can be seen as an excellent example of conflict of values. New idea that social crisis can be overcome via implementation of programmes aimed at developing democratic and leadership values inside the community was and still is at odds in most CTs. This is due to the fact that societies with communist past once used to live while being financed by their governments and developed the perception of getting direct financial aid as the only way to address community needs. In general changing perceptions and accepting new values, in this case democratic values of free public participation are amongst hardest changes that societies in CTs are undergoing now. However, they will start having effect in the future if these societies are ready to give their time and efforts to stay on the way of democratic

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124 From the interview with Evan Johanssen, the Secretary of YMCA Sportsalliance of Denmark, Copenhagen
reforms\textsuperscript{125}. In case with the Vardenis YMCA, this problem is already fading away as more and more kids gradually join the NGO and get involved in different activities aimed at improving their leadership values and providing rich base for enriching their knowledge. Currently, knowledge and skills are gaining importance in the eyes of the community residents as they acknowledge that positive changes like taking youth away from streets and letting kids develop their personal and cultural skills is the best way to invest in the community’s future. The truth is that today’s kids are tomorrow’s grown ups taking responsibility for their actions and caring for their community\textsuperscript{126}.

Another problem that became an obstacle at the beginning point of the project was associated with gender issues. Vardenis like most Armenian communities had been living for centuries within the tradition of denying women participation in decision-making processes. Despite today this tradition is almost eliminated due to changes in the views of society with more and more women getting access to education and participation in decision-making processes, there are remnants of this unhealthy treatment still present in the community. This resulted in the pressure on behalf of the community and parents on their kids, which prevented young people from developing personally and developing leadership skills. However, the NGO managed to produce positive changes in this field as it constantly stresses the gender issues through its programs and amongst its members and spreads democratic values throughout its everyday activities. Today girls are equally represented in the NGO and enjoy to full extent their rights of participation in decision-making and personal development\textsuperscript{127}.

Thus the challenge of developing leadership amongst the NGO’s members and programs’ participants depends on the recurrent practice of democracy and Human Rights based on the developed framework of trainings and continual programmes.

\textbf{II. Development of new programmes}

This challenge is a very important aspect for the Vardenis YMCA potential development. It reaches out directly to participants benefiting from the NGO’s programmes and determines whether or not more participants will be drawn to its programs. Baring in mind that today’s participants are tomorrow’s members, the NGO has to continue developing new programs and improving existing ones based on the needs of participating youth. Thus today it is planning to expand its programme framework and offer new programs and services, which will be:

- Mathematics skills development
- Theatre art
- Preparation of Youth for Employment
- Library

\textsuperscript{125} Article by Randall J. Davis: The Rebirth of the Nonprofit Sector in Post-communist Eastern Europe: Past Ideology: Mandatory Voluntarism, Center for Civil Society International on http://www.friends-partners.org/ccsi/resource/ecnoprrt.htm. Page last updated on 06/05/96. First accessed on 05/09/2001 from Lund University, Sweden

\textsuperscript{126} From the interview with Evan Johanssen, the Secretary of YMCA Sportsalliance of Denmark, Copenhagen

\textsuperscript{127} From the interview with Evan Johanssen, the Secretary of YMCA Sportsalliance of Denmark, Copenhagen
Nonetheless, programs' developers should always be aware of the perception on behalf of the community that the NGO "can be everything to everyone" should not be misleading the programme developers towards sacrificing the quality of offered programs to quantity. Also the fact that a significant number of children still cannot access the services offered by the NGO even with the lowest fees required, keeps down the level of youth involvement in the new programs. At this point challenges of creating and maintaining human resources in programme framework link to the challenges of creating funding base for running new programs.

4.2.2. Challenges in finding proper funding while developing programme framework

The need for funding is very urgent as the Vardenis YMCA expands its programme framework and has to find financial means for providing necessary material and technical base. The need to address financial aspect of the programs' development is very important also from the participants' perspective due to facts that:

- "Even with the lowest fees required, access is denied to a significant number of children because the families cannot afford the fees
- Young people from the villages are unable to use the programs because of lack of transportation.
- Computer programs are in high demand but costs are a barrier for many"

Thus development of fundraising projects as well as creation of constant income source for partial financing of the NGO's programs becomes an important challenge for the NGO. However, at present the NGO is actively seeking for the ways to find effective funding sources. As one of the most popular ways to get sound funding it sees joint programme development based on partnership and cooperation with other NGOs and funding organisations, which is achieved by means of creating and maintaining communication network.

4.3. Challenges while creating communication network

Communication network is an important aspect in the NGO's development since it provides the organisation with access to information on international level and facilitates information exchange with its stakeholders, supports and facilitates establishment of good partnership and cooperation connection with other NGOs and finally provides access to funding. Although the Vardenis YMCA has established good partnership and cooperation traditions with other Armenian national YMCAs and the YMCA Sportsalliance of Denmark, it is challenged with the need to establish more

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129 See supra p. 40: 4.2.2. Challenges in finding proper funding while developing programme framework

130 Organisation assessment and strategic plan: Organisational review, 5.1.2. Findings: A. Need to seek new funding sources p. 10 submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001

131 See supra p. 24: 2.1.3. Improving social communication via cooperation networking
communication ties also with other associations of the worldwide YMCA family in order to be able to expand its programme framework and become an active participant in the worldwide YMCA movement\textsuperscript{132}. However, the establishment of the communication with interested NGOs and other stakeholders is tied to the need to provide the NGO with telephone, fax, the Internet and other information technologies that will help the NGO improve external communication\textsuperscript{133}.

Thus it is important that the NGO finds the means to obtain the necessary technology that will enable it to improve the existing partnerships and to develop bilateral agreements with other NGO worldwide (Canada, France, USA, etc.) and to participate in international training seminars and events, exchange programs and camps\textsuperscript{134}. This can be done in its turn with the help of already existing partner NGOs that can invest into the communication technologies’ equipment to provide the Vardenis YMCA with possibility to start developing its communication network.

4.4. Summing up: Major outcomes of the “Vardenis” project

At this point the outcomes of the “Vardenis” project can be summarised as the following:

> The project accomplished the stated goals and laid down a solid base for the further development of the Vardenis YMCA and its activities in the local community

> Despite the project goals were achieved there is still need for continuing improvements in the NGO as it faces number of challenges on the way of building capacity. These challenges include:

  - Making work of the Board members and the Administration staff more effective
  - Developing leadership skills amongst NGO members
  - Creating new programmes targeting more activities and more participants
  - Finding more fundraising projects and funding sources new programmes
  - Improving communication network.

> As the NGO treats mentioned challenges rather as opportunities for becoming more effective in its work with the community, it finds the following solutions for the improvements:

  - The work of the Board and the Administration can become more effective if
    - Their responsibilities are made clear
    - The procedures for the Board elections and functions of the Board members are straightened

\textsuperscript{132} Organisation assessment and strategic plan: Organisational review, 5.1.2. Findings: *C. Communications, National and International Network* pp.11-12 submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid

\textsuperscript{134} YMCA Vardenis Strategic Plan 2001-2005: Strategic aim 4 (partnership development), *Objectives* p. 2, submitted by David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor, CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) on April 11, 2001
The tools for raising effectiveness of the Board during decision-making processes are developed.

Trainings for improving working skills of the Board and the Administration staff are carried out.

- Leadership skills of the NGO members can be developed and improved through introduction of leadership training framework.
- New programmes can be created through careful needs analysis based on the opinion poll of the NGO members and programme participants.
- The need for more funding sources and fundraising projects can be met through improving cooperation and partnership with other YMCAs worldwide.
- And finally communication network can be established with the help of partner organisations in obtaining necessary technical means of communication.

Despite the importance of each of the existing challenges, the priority should be given to development of human resources of the NGO, which is created by people to serve needs of people.\(^\text{135}\)

\(^{135}\) See supra pg. 39, 4. 2. Challenges while developing programme framework
5. Conclusions

At this point number of general conclusions can be drawn as a final step in the work.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union number of countries known today as CTs, have entered the process of social changes characterised by reconstruction of their economic and social systems. The current paper attempted to provide an overview of development of the NGO sector and tried to demonstrate how development of environmental NGOs can lead to SD in these regions.

In the work, public participation is seen as the main idea about NGOs that act as independent or deliberative institutions and play key role “in the articulation of the demands of citizens through active participation and consciousness-raising”136. Thus NGOs can be addressed as “agents of change” that work in the field of promoting public participation and in a way serve as symbol for it. Later on, the paper observes some examples of NGO activities designed and implemented within the frame of their policy of becoming “agents of change”. If deliberative democracy be considered as a means for enabling public participation in the CTs, the process of SD shapes up as a process of socio-economic reforms based on the increased public participation that targets fulfilment of Human Rights, and first of all right to development137. This interpretation also means that SD is first of all about sustainable human development, which in its turn aims to “expand choices for all people-women, men and children, current and future generations while protecting the natural systems on which all life depends”138. Thus sustainable human development puts people at the centre, and views humans as both a means and an end of development. The presented HR framework further stressed the idea that SD can be achieved through fulfilment HR that can be in its turn promoted through active participation of NGOs.

Thematic case studies were used to prove this statement and show some real life examples from the experience of different environmental NGOs in local communities of CTs. At this point the author arrived at conclusion that can serve as both the facilitators and products of democratisation processes taking place in the CTs. They serve catalyst for SD in CTs by means of advocating for environment, which includes number of strategies such as carrying out green education programmes, promoting democratic values and improving social communication via cooperation networking.

The central case study of the “Vardenis” project in Armenia, following the thematic case studies, was used to provide a more narrow regional focus and to take a deeper look at the work of NGOs and challenges and opportunities they can face in communities of CTs. While challenges may differ varying from country to country due to diversity of cultural and traditional heritage and needs of communities, the author found that however, there are number of major problems that are common for NGOs in CTs. These are particularly problems of gaining public trust in the work of NGOs and

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into power of collective action, which require much more time and efforts on behalf NGOs and governments that work on designing SD policies.

However, as the ideas of public participation and promotion of HR are accepted every day on increasingly wider social scale in the CTs, the NGOs start gaining back public appreciation and trust in their work. This empowers them to take further steps in performing as “agents of change” that work on SD for societies in the CTs.
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Conventions


Declarations


Cases related documentation
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ECOLOGIA NGO online resources on http://www.ecologia.org/


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ANNEXTURE 1

YMCA VARDENIS STRATEGIC PLAN 2001-2005

PREAMBLE
The methodology for the development of YMCA Vardenis Strategic Plan 2001 – 2005 was designed to include all the key stakeholders throughout the process. The strategies that were developed are a product of all those who participated from within the organization and from the larger community.

To this end YMCA Vardenis has acquired the services of an external professional expert from Canada (David Evershed, Volunteer Advisor CESO) to provide assistance in obtaining information through face-to-face interviews and focus groups, in carrying out an Organizational Assessment and in conducting the Strategic Planning Workshop.

MISSION
YMCA Vardenis is a constituent part of the YMCAs Movement Worldwide. Through its vocation it seeks to serve the needs of the community, especially of children and young people there, by sharing the struggle they face and searching together for positive values and fundamental solutions.

STRATEGIC AIM 1 (LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT)
As a human centered organisation YMCA is for people and by people, therefore human resource development is fundamental for all aspects of the organisation.

Objectives
To actively pursue volunteer development, especially to develop the leadership skills and Motivation of Board and Committee members.

To expand staff development activities and on the job training for allowing them to carry out their duties with the required skills.

To secure an environment of ongoing and holistic personal development for its members to this end best using a variety of approaches of non-formal education.

STRATEGIC AIM 2 (PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT)
As a service organisation to deliver spectrum of programmes that best meet the needs of the community, especially children and young people there.

Objectives
To consolidate and expand existing programmes (TenSing, Outdoor Education, Child Care, IT and Language Classes) through mainstreaming volunteer service in their delivery.

To develop new programmes to meet changing needs and to increase YMCA membership through determining flexible and acceptable levels for program fees.

To strive to make the YMCA services accessible to all young people in the community who would benefit from their participation.
STRATEGIC AIM 3 (INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT)
As a founding member of the National Union of YMCAS of Armenia, YMCA Vardenis seeks to play an active role in the development of the YMCAs Movement in Armenia.

Objectives
To stand in all levels of its involvement for traditions of civil society based on efficient and participatory decision-making structures and procedures, with special emphasis on further development of Board and Committees practices within the organisation.

To stand in all levels of its involvement for moral community of democratic consciousness, culture and change, with special emphasis on capacity building for actions combating any kinds of violence of human dignity.

To stand in all levels of its involvement for organisational culture relevantly based on ecumenical values of Christianity, with special emphasis on profile development mainstreaming those values.

STRATEGIC AIM 4 (PARTNERSHIPS DEVELOPMENT)
As a constituent part of the YMCA Movement Worldwide, to implement international linkages with YMCA's across the world, as well as with other like organisations.

Objectives
To continue with existing partnerships (YMCA Sports and Y's Men Denmark) and to develop new bilateral agreements across the world (Canada, France, USA in particular).

To continue to promote and implement the participation of YMCA Vardenis in international training seminars and events, exchange programmes, volunteer placements, etc.

To obtain access to telephone, fax, the Internet and other information technologies that will assist YMCA Vardenis in improving external communication.

STRATEGIC AIM 5 (FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT)
The success in achieving the objectives of the above strategic aims and objectives is dependent on the development of sustainable sources of revenue.

Objectives
To explore and develop new funding sources supporting the realization of this strategy, as well as the annual plans emerging from it.

To set priorities and implement planned steps for renovating the YMCA House, as a guarantee of relevant consolidation and expansion of services.

To build up capacities ensuring economic efficiency, credibility and self-sustainability of YMCA Vardenis.
ANNEXTURE 2

Questionnaire
Used in Interview with Evan Johanssen, the Secretary of YMCA Sports of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark

1. When originated the idea of launching “Vardenis” project in Armenia and what was the vision behind it?
2. To whom the idea initially belonged?
3. What were the goals of the project?
4. What organisations or agencies or other legal structures were involved in the project?
5. Which, in your opinion, was the hardest stage during implementation of the project?
6. What were and what are the main problems on the way of Vardenis YMCA development?
7. Which needs of the local community, from your point of view, should be addressed on the first place?
8. What are the main challenges and opportunities in the NGO’s work today?
9. Are there any fundraising projects being developed currently?
10. Can you make any projections regarding future development of the NGO activity on the community?
11. Does the NGO plan to establish more connections and partnership projects with other YMCAs worldwide?