



ARMENIA

BACKGROUND

Formerly part of the Soviet Union, Armenia has undergone broad political, economic and social transformations. Since 2003, the country has experienced steady development, despite the impact of the 2009 financial crisis and the unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Armenia has implemented a number of EU-inspired reforms and maintains a relationship with the EU, as well as economic ties with the Russian Federation and other countries in the region. In 2015, Armenia became a member of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Armenia is making efforts to establish a functional democracy and good governance by improving its legal and regulatory mechanisms. The Strategy for Legal and Judicial Reforms (2012-2016) aims to improve the legal framework, increase access to justice and strengthen the independence of the judiciary. Yet, corruption remains a serious issue in Armenia, with the 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index showing that Armenia scored 35/100, and that it had regressed from 2014.¹ Public mistrust of the justice system and its integrity remain especially high,² with further reforms necessary to strengthen the rule of law.

¹ Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2015". Available from <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2015/#results-table> (accessed 21 June 2016)

² CRRG Armenia, "Caucasus Barometer (CB) - Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in the South Caucasus Countries", 15 June 2015.

There were several important reviews and events in 2015. In January, Armenia underwent its second UPR. 189 recommendations were received as a result of this process, 155 of which were fully accepted. In May, Armenia received the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, whose initial comments indicate certain gaps in the current institutional child protection framework. This was followed by a visit from the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe in October, with the Commissioner noting “persisting reports of torture and ill-treatment by the police and other law enforcement agencies, often with a view to obtaining confessions, are of major concern.”

Finally, in December, a referendum was held on constitutional amendments proposed by the ruling party that would move Armenia from a presidential to a parliamentary system. The proposed amendments passed with a reported 63.5 percent of the vote.³

ASSISTANCE AND IMPACT

With the protection and promotion of human rights being a key focus in Armenia, one of UNDP’s priorities in 2015 was ensuring the involvement of government agencies and civil society in following-up and monitoring the implementation of the UPR recommendations, and its alignment with the National Human Rights Action Plan. This was complemented by a series of advocacy events and technical discussions at the national and local levels, involving both government and civil society, to help bring attention to human rights issues.

The border with Georgia remains of crucial importance for Armenian exporters and importers as the port of Poti, and to an extent a highway that connects Georgia with Russia, are the major gateways to external markets. To help address this longstanding concern, UNDP supported an upgrade of border infrastructure, including construction on three border crossing points. This construction included the provision of equip-

ment, power supply, fibre optic network, and IT systems. During this process, the fibre optic and gas network was also extended to seven neighbouring communities, providing access to the fibre optic network for 56,000 people, and to the gas network for 1,200 households. UNDP also contributed to the drafting of the Standard Operating Procedures for the Bagratashen border crossing point and developed protocols for the implementation of an advanced online customs data exchange between customs authorities of both countries. Finally, UNDP also finalized a draft agreement on border delegates between Georgia and Armenia, which is currently with the respective foreign ministries for clearance.

In efforts to boost innovation in governance, UNDP helped establish an innovation hub within the Government. Using expertise from UK-based specialists FutureGov, and a study tour for the Government to the Danish organization, MindLab, UNDP supported the co-design of a new Open Governance Centre concept and a TEDx event on public sector innovation.⁴

Innovation also played an important role as UNDP’s Kolba Lab led an initiative to increase public engagement with government. Through crowdsourcing, social innovation camps and hackathons, 20 citizen-led projects in local governance, human rights, and the green economy were generated. These projects are currently at various stages of prototyping and have involved around 350 active citizens, civil servants and members of civil society organizations.



Kolba Labs: Encouraging social business idea development through teamwork

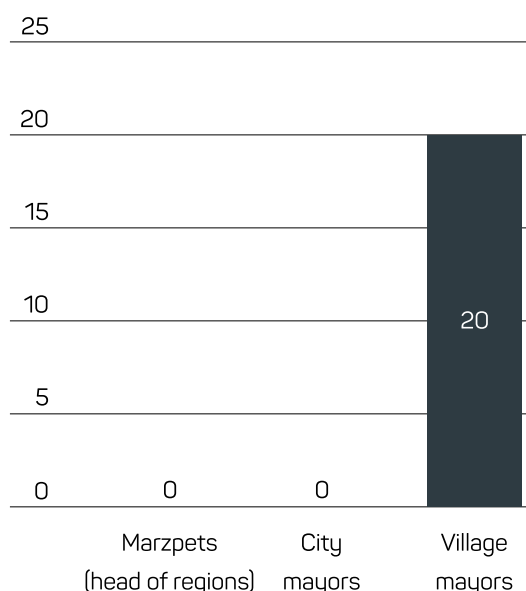
Photo by: UNDP Armenia

³ OSCE/ODIHR, “Armenia, Constitutional Referendum, 6 December 2015: Final Report”, 5 February 2016. Available from <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/220656>

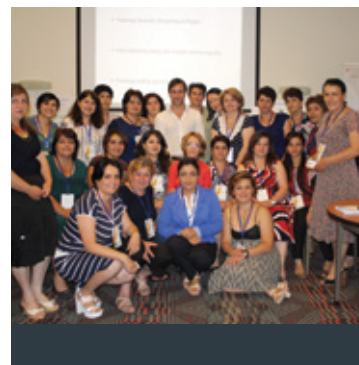
⁴ OneArmenia, “A politician, a UN rep and a comedian walk into a bar...”, 2 February 2016. Available from https://onearmenia.org/blog_post/a-politician-a-un-rep-and-a-comedian-walk-into-a-bar/

Kolba also lent support to Armenia's OGP engagement, using crowdsourcing⁵ to encourage citizen inputs for the national OGP strategy for 2016–2018. UNDP has also been working to combat one of the primary drivers of disengagement – corruption. Bolstered by the formation of a new Anti-Corruption Council chaired by the Prime Minister, UNDP contributed to the development of a new anti-corruption strategy for 2015–2018. Now formally adopted by the Government, the strategy will target four main areas – healthcare, education, revenue collection and the police.

To advance women's rights and empowerment, UNDP supported the political participation of women at the local level by implementing capacity development programmes for 490 women. As a result, 20 women ran for election in 37 communities, with 19 being elected. To enlarge the pool of women vying for seats in the local elections in 2016, an additional 204 women were trained on leadership, community development, local governance, gender equality and participatory democracy. Furthermore, UNDP's Women in Local Democracy programme code-designed, prototyped and tested 'women-to-women' mentorship schemes and 'I am the Community'



Source: National Statistical Service RA, 2012



At the Women Leadership School organized by the UNDP 'Women in Local Democracy' project

Photo by: UNDP Armenia

leadership camps. The latter resulted in 26 self-sustaining community initiatives in 21 communities.

In a positive development for the rights of people with disabilities, UNDP supported a comprehensive government reform to change the disability classification model from a medical to a biopsychosocial model,⁶ a move supported by the UN Partnership for the Rights of People with Disabilities. This brings it into line with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, and the CRPD. With joint support from UNDP and UNICEF, 300 medical experts, social workers and other respective personnel were trained to carry out the reform in the initial phase. Armenia is one of the leading countries in this initiative, with assessment tools already developed and piloted with 1,200 people. Complementing this, UNDP supported increased political inclusion of people with disabilities by facilitating discussions between 280 people in 11 communities (130 of which were people with disabilities) and their respective local government representatives.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD

A range of issues confront Armenia going forward. Despite the progress to date, improvements are necessary in areas such as non-discrimination, freedom from torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement, and the rights of persons with disabilities. A key step is for Armenia to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, and

⁵ Open Government Partnership, "Armenia uses "Crowdsourcing" to design a government action plan", 22 April 2016. Available from <http://www.ogp.am/en/news/item/2016/04/22/3rdAPmeetings/>

⁶ The new model shifts viewing disability as a static medical condition towards understanding it as a life experience, and designing interventions that reduce activity limitations and increase participation in all aspects of life.

ensure accountability for attacks and threats against vulnerable groups. Due to the prevalence of violence against women, there is also an urgent need for a law on domestic violence. For UNDP, improving border management will remain a high priority going forward, with a new programme expected to be launched. In addition to investigating innovative solutions, this programme will research the economic benefits of more effective border management.

In support of a more open society grounded on human rights, UNDP will continue and expand efforts to monitor and coordinate responses to the UPR recommendations and launch a programme to extend OGP principles into the justice sector. Further support will also be provided to boost innovation in

the public sector, with Kolba Lab helping to generate innovative solutions to public sector challenges. UNDP will also continue to help tackle corruption and abuse of power through supporting efforts to introduce more transparency and accountability into institutions. A key priority in this area will be helping with the implementation of the Anti-Corruption Strategy 2015-2018.

Going forward, UNDP plans to continue to increase the electability of women, and foster an enabling environment for women to participate – particularly through the introduction of gender quotas at the local level, and practical schemes for women’s leadership and engagement at all levels.



Key results

Significant upgrade of border infrastructure at three border crossing points between Georgia and Armenia

20 citizen-led projects from UNDP’s Kolba Lab in various stages of prototyping with the involvement of 350 citizens

19 women elected to local government positions after UNDP-run capacity development programmes

Disability classification model reformed to align with International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, and the CRPD

