

**ANALYSIS OF YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL SESSION ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
GAMCON YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

Objectives and methodology of the training

The focus of this training was to reflect upon what it means “civic / citizens engagement” in the public arena of Gagauz society. Training was attended by 22 local activist from several towns and villages in Gagauzia.

I started training with quote of German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, who said “*it takes six months to replace a political system, six years to transform an economic system, and 60 years to change a society*”. But it is not about waiting 60 years, but it requires citizens working hard to rebuild society and learn their new roles.

One obvious role for citizens in democratic societies is voting. But there is lot of other roles – volunteering, community organizing, advocacy, etc. All those “community interventions” define active civic engagement and platform for citizens to participate and work for social change that can improve relations and conditions in communities. Civic engagement builds equal partnership and dialogue with local, regional and national authorities.

“Civic / citizens engagement” is a platform to identify, recruit and develop leadership of active people in community, build community around leadership and build community power. Through civic engagement citizens are able to contribute ideas, energy and action to improve their communities.

Training was considered as an introductory training – to provide basic, general set of information for participants. The training helps participants to be more strategic with community based activities. The emphasis was on engagement with the participants along with some *learning by doing*, role plays, feedback from peers etc. Participants started to develop a plan of action for taking these skills back home. It will be to participants benefit to be willing to take risks - try to practice new behaviors in dealing with others, re-examine their own current strengths/weaknesses and be open to feedback.

Four main goals of training:

- 1) Cover to basic of civic engagement
- 2) Explore ways to build local communities
- 3) Fine tune the skills to pursue changes in communities

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4) Envisions areas for changes in communities

Participants expectations from training:

- To gain new knowledge
- Explore new approaches in their local work (as a local civic activists)
- To share experiences among themselves
- To hear specific examples

Each training session followed 3 steps model – **1. theory** explained with **2. specific example** and followed with **3. how to do it back home exercise** – group work to brainstorm and plan how to implement just learned approach in own local community. Working language was Russian, so I believe we were able to build mutual understanding and trust with participants. I presented examples and cases from own experiences working in Slovakia as well as from Moldova, where I was working between September 2012 and May 2015, and since I am traveling back to country to conduct citizens participation training and consultations for different Moldovan civil society organizations (one of the participant from this training participated in training and consultation I led in September 2017). I did more than 10 training on this topic in Russian language (in Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, and in Lithuania for Belarus organizations), so I feel confident with my knowledge of Russian language generally, as well as with specific vocabulary for this topic, but also with understanding of trends and approaches of civil society organization in Moldova / Gagauzia. Training was interactive, with space for participants to share their experiences, potential challenges, opinions etc. As a trainer I tried to be responsive to questions and/or concerns. I offered to participants that they may contact me after training to receive additional information and consultations. I shared with participants my business cards with email and Skype.

Participants had chance to learn basics of how to:

- bring people together, challenging them to act on behalf of their shared values and interest
- provide space to connect to, engage with and inspire leaders across ordinary boundaries of gender, age, language, politics and life experiences
- develop relationships with institutional leaders and individuals, bringing them into alliances for change.
- work with leaders to develop leadership skills and their capacity to act powerfully on their own behalf.
- form action teams around various issues, provide and coordinate effective leadership training so that team members can create alliances, analyze problems and discover solutions.

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- organize issue campaigns at the neighborhood, city, regional and statewide levels.

Each working day we finished with evaluation asking three questions:

- 1) what was good and they learn enough about it to implement immediately
- 2) what was interesting, but they need either more information or they have to think how to do it in their communities
- 3) what was bad

From answers (written and verbal) we can say that participants highly appreciated model of training – *“theory – example – exercise how to do it”*, experiences and examples of trainer, work in smaller groups, visualization, specific recommendations etc.

They are interested to learn more about building strategy to build sustainable civic groups, about group dynamic and how to build capacity of group members. Those topics I plan to cover in second training. At the last, third training, I would like to cover topic of building relations with citizens, media, PR, and self-presentation.

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