



SUCCESS STORY

Citizens Engage Local Government

Communities and local governments cooperate to solve housing issues



Photo: Urban Institute

A homeowners' association spurred the clean-up of an apartment building.

Homeowners' associations not only resolve building maintenance problems, but they also are an effective vehicle for governments to communicate and cooperate with their constituents.

After declaring its independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia privatized individual apartments in multi-unit buildings, but it didn't address responsibility for common areas such as stairways, roofs and foundations. Although the cities remain technically responsible for these spaces, the Soviet-era departments responsible for maintenance are now defunct. As roofs began to leak and foundations crumbled, the need for new organizations to address this issue became acute.

USAID has helped organize several homeowners' associations in three cities to get communities and local governments to work together to resolve the communal areas issue. The associations developed one-year action plans, requiring quarterly association meetings at which officials presented to the membership their progress on fee collection rates, activities and expenditures. The associations and local government also supplied labor and cash to match USAID assistance for roof reconstruction and drainage projects.

At the same time, the associations launched activities with their own funds, such as fixing water pipes, landscaping and exterminating pests. One homeowners' association mobilized more than 30 people from an apartment building to clean and paint the entrance area using materials purchased by the association.

At the end of the project, two of the participating cities decided to establish their own assistance matching projects for repairs in multi-unit buildings with homeowners' associations. In 2004, the cities organized open and transparent competitions to award more than \$33,000 for roof repair, and both cities included funding for homeowners' associations in their 2005 budgets. When one mayor announced a 2005 homeowners' association grant program, he said that the program had been successful because the match requirement made residents feel — and behave — like owners of their buildings for the first time.

Other cities, including the capital Tbilisi, have requested training to form their own homeowners' associations, reaffirming that the groups are not only a solution to the problem of building maintenance, but also an effective vehicle for governments to communicate and cooperate with their constituents.