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Working to Strengthen Civil Society



Photo: Counterpart International/Aytem Aliyeva

When USAID announced a project to form partnerships with civil society organizations to develop their management capacity, the organizations were thrilled. The initiative, part of the agency's efforts to strengthen Azerbaijan's civil society, will help these groups put in place performance-based management systems, consulting and training services, diversified funding bases, and financially transparent accounting systems.

The 11 organizations work in the areas of economic and social development, policy research, legal assistance, and youth and gender equality. Eight of the partners are known as "support" organizations — meaning

Representatives of civil society organizations gather with USAID officials in Baku, Azerbaijan to formalize an initiative to strengthen their capacity in July 2006.

that their goal is to help develop civil society by providing community-based organizations, media, the private sector, and local governments with resources and services that will strengthen them and help them grow. They also play a vital role in building civil society by bringing together various stakeholders to discuss and act on local and national issues and encourage civic participation in public oversight and decision-making. Six of the organizations are based in "the regions" — Lenkoran, Imishli, Ganja, Barda, Sheki, Sumgayit — areas located far outside Azerbaijan's capital, Baku. This is important, because it enables them to deliver services to organizations that have less access and exposure to new management tools.

"These organizations are helping to lay the foundation for civic activism, effective policy reform and policy implementation at the local and national levels," said Scott Taylor, USAID Country Coordinator for Azerbaijan, during an event held in Baku to mark the initiative's announcement in July 2006.

"It is strategically very important that six [of the support organizations] are based in the regions. It reflects and supports the priority of the Government of Azerbaijan to further develop civil society at the regional level," concluded Tahir Suleymanov, a representative from the Office of the President of Azerbaijan, during his remarks at the event.