



SUCCESS STORY

Citizens of Fizuli district participate in decision-making process

USAID Civil Society Project helps municipality to enhance dialogue with constituents and build trust.



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Tabriz Souleymanov
A citizen

"Renovation of the municipal building, installation of a notice board and suggestion box, and continuous efforts to bring people together has enhanced working relations between municipal officials and their constituents. Now, citizens disclose ideas and concerns to us without hesitation, and we are in a much better position to address them".

Behbid Karimov
Municipal Chairman

Praxis Support to Social Development (www.praxis.az), a local civil society organization with financial and technical support from USAID's Civil Society Project, implemented a project entitled "Participation of Internally Displaced Persons in Local Self-Government" in Boyuk Bahmanli and Ashagi Kurdmahmudlu municipalities of Fizuli district. With the help of Praxis, the municipality renovated its municipal building, placed a suggestion box and public notice board in front of the municipal government offices, issued monthly municipal bulletins, established a public commission to review and prioritize citizen suggestions and organized various capacity-building trainings for municipal officials and citizen activists.

The project has enhanced the transparency of municipal budgets and has increased citizen contributions. For example, 30 local residents in Boyuk Bahmanli municipality paid their municipality taxes in one day. In addition, a simple suggestion box has elicited useful ideas from community members. Based on these citizen suggestions, Boyuk Bahmanli municipal council included road rehabilitation and improvement of the water supply system for a new settlement in the 2008 budget. Tabriz Souleymanov, a resident from Boyuk Bahmanli, noted, *"The suggestion box and public notice board created the opportunity for us to propose new ideas to the municipality and learn more about municipal activities. It simultaneously helps us evaluate the activities of the municipality."*

Following the implementation of this civic engagement project within the targeted municipal areas, the attitudes of citizens toward the municipalities have undergone positive changes. Now anyone can get information from the public notice board on municipal affairs, including its achievements, taxes, budgets, upcoming action plans, etc. Behbid Karimov says, *"Frankly, due to the general mistrust of citizens towards municipalities, we were afraid that people will not take our activities seriously. However, with this project, residents were able to propose suggestions including the improvement of the water supply system in the newly established settlement, road rehabilitation, creation of the maintenance station, establishment of an "event tent" for rent, etc. Furthermore, we received a request from a neighboring municipality to share our experience and lessons learnt, and help them with similar activities in their municipality."* Following the completion of this USAID-funded Civil Society project, Praxis has received a number of requests to implement similar civic engagement projects within other municipalities of Fizuli district.



The Civil Society Project is a United States Agency for International Development initiative, implemented by Counterpart International in partnership with the Urban Institute and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. The goal of the Civil Society Project is to assist the citizens and government of Azerbaijan to develop a dialogue while working towards the creation of a more representative and better functioning democracy.