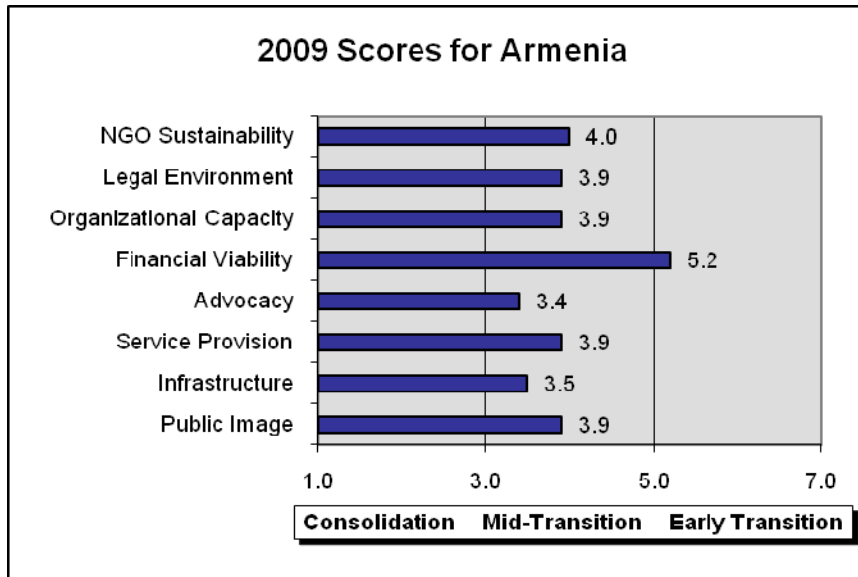


ARMENIA



Capital: Yerevan

Polity: Republic

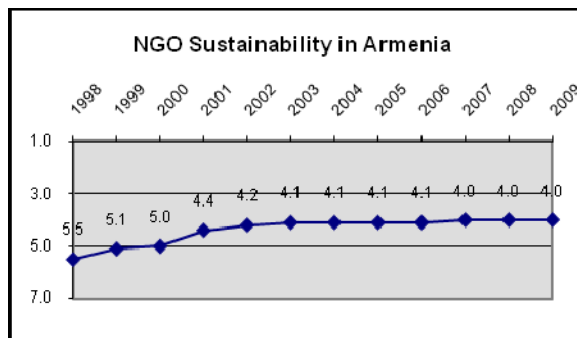
Population: 2,966,802 (July 2010 est.)

GDP per capita (PPP): \$5,900 (2009 est.)

NGO SUSTAINABILITY: 4.0

The estimated number of registered public organizations in Armenia, including membership NGOs, foundations, and associations, is upwards of 4,000. Only 10–15 percent of these registered organizations, however, are actively pursuing their missions at any given time, and only a small number is mission-driven and working independently of international donor funding. The prevailing legal framework still adversely affects NGO sustainability and does not allow for the growing diversity and complexity of the NGO sector.

normal, some NGOs remained reluctant to take risks and move forward on their missions, while others successfully regained momentum in implementing their activities.



The prospects for international funding continue to dwindle, leading to a gradual weeding out of weaker NGOs and a consolidation of activities among NGOs. NGOs are seeking to leverage their program resources by actively partnering with one another. A greater number of NGOs started to plan their activities more strategically. NGO training providers noted greater demand for training in institutional capacity building.

The ripple effect of the post-presidential election unrest from March 2008 continued through 2009. While the general atmosphere returned to

NGOs are pushing harder on both open and closed doors in national and municipal government through focused advocacy initiatives. As in 2008, the public perception of NGOs remained generally positive. While their active participation in the 2007–2009 election cycles contributed to their image, NGOs’ more concerted efforts to match their missions to public concerns also helped to improve the perception of their role among communities and citizens. NGOs were also successful in

developing cooperative relationships with the government, especially in the regions. A

network of sixty NGOs that formed in 2008 was active in formulation of the 2010 state budget.

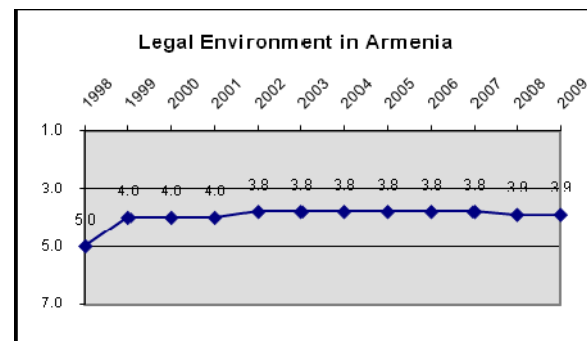
LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 3.9

Three laws regulate the NGO sector: the Law on Public Organizations, the Charity Law, and the Law on Foundations. The majority of NGOs are registered under the Law on Public Organizations, which requires new organizations to register with the State Registry based in the Ministry of Justice.

NGOs claim that the registration process is corrupt and difficult in practice. Some NGOs reported that they were asked to pay “fees” to accelerate the registration process. Eventually officials registered NGOs, although with delays and additional bureaucratic obstacles. The process is somewhat expensive and burdensome, particularly for NGOs that have to travel from the provinces in order to register, although official seals confirming registration are now available in provincial offices. New NGOs made less than half a dozen complaints about the registration process.

Controversial draft amendments to the NGO Law initially prompted fears of a less liberal operating environment and were the subject of discussions and rumors that had a disruptive impact on the NGO sector. Many groups mobilized around this issue, leaving some with fewer resources for their regular activities. As a result of NGOs’ active advocacy efforts, parliament did not adopt the proposed

detrimental changes by the end of the year. An exodus of lawyers experienced in nonprofit sector law to the private sector and other more lucrative practice areas caused concern among NGOs and reduced the already sparse legal capacity in the NGO sector.



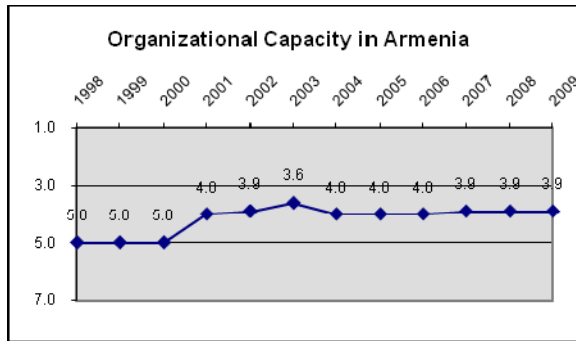
The legal framework continued to prevent NGOs from generating income and failed to provide beneficial tax exemptions. NGOs registered under the Law on Public Organizations are prohibited from engaging in direct income-generating activities, although foundations may. In addition, the Law on Public Organizations only permits NGOs to register as general membership organizations, which prevents the adoption of organizational structures such as boards of directors or advisory councils.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.9

NGOs continued to improve their organizational capacities in response to the increasingly competitive environment created by the decline in grant opportunities. NGOs put more emphasis on diversifying their menu of services and on reaching out to their direct beneficiaries and broader communities.

Observers noted a healthy but ad-hoc trend of organizations leveraging their missions and strengths to attract funding. NGOs with sector-

specific expertise such as, disability support services or environmental protection worked jointly with groups focused on broader reform issues, such as anti-corruption, election observation, and media support. A number of organizations, for instance, observed the Yerevan mayoral elections in May by partnering with groups that had funding but lacked human resources or expertise.



The decline in funding has led to improved planning and strategic programming practices, which have become institutionalized in stronger national-level NGOs. The quality of NGO personnel has improved and, as a result of donor requirements, a number of NGOs now have clearly defined staff responsibilities. NGOs also use opportunities to bring volunteers on board and to hire students as staff members and interns. NGOs have come to rely on volunteers to maintain program continuity and to enhance organizational capacity. University students increasingly recognize the benefits of volunteerism as a way to prepare for the workforce in a declining economy. Some

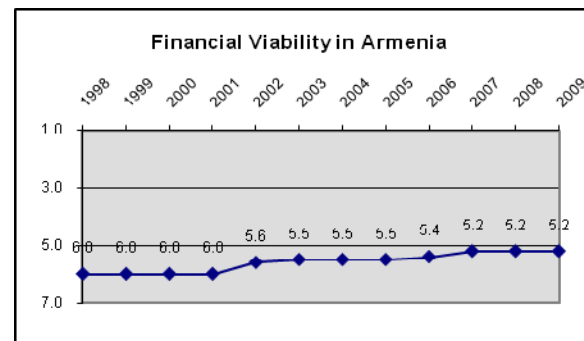
FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.2

Although the economic situation and the impact of the economic crisis were not favorable for NGO funding, NGOs started earning income from more diverse sources, including from smaller private donors and foundations. NGOs now actively seek private funding as well as support from international donors that have not had a strong presence in Armenia in the past. Local sources of NGO funding are still limited, although NGOs report more support from local businesses. More NGOs began acquiring fundraising skills and tapped into international resources for building fundraising capacity. North American and European experts made several trips to conduct fundraising trainings and consultations and to build local capacity for fundraising activities. NGOs tended to target private individuals because businesses lack tax breaks or other incentives to engage in philanthropic activities.

Armenian diasporans also sought to volunteer in Armenia; according to several organizations, this was also a byproduct of the global recession, as people had lost their jobs in their home countries.

Though many NGOs continue to be driven by charismatic leaders, more organizations, especially youth-led groups, are adopting a more inclusive approach toward management and leadership within the organizations and across coalitions. NGO boards continue to be poorly integrated into organizations and do not contribute to improved accountability or impact, except in a few cases. At the same time, a greater number of activists are informally creating groupings for targeted activities.

Many NGOs have adequate equipment for their operations. NGOs demonstrated considerable technical advancement, particularly in increasing their online presence through the use of blogs. NGOs enjoyed increased Internet access and mobile network speed, particularly in large cities. Access to the Internet is spotty in rural parts of the country.



The government continues to provide small-scale funding to NGOs, primarily in the areas of social services for vulnerable populations and public awareness campaigns about issues such as hygiene and health. Recipient organizations tend to be pro-government and noncontroversial. NGOs have increased opportunities to receive funding to provide services from local self-governing bodies. A mechanism for social partnership is now in place in seventeen

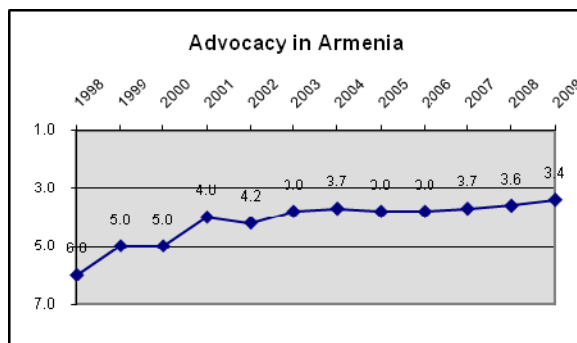
municipalities, including six new ones during the year.

Many organizations fear that they will be targeted by the tax authorities if they engage in economic activities, although in the last year an increasing number of NGOs began establishing affiliated for-profit entities that were used to generate income from entrepreneurial activities. The government justifies its heightened oversight of economic activity by claiming that

nonprofit organizations will evolve into de facto for-profit organizations hiding behind their nonprofit status. NGOs often fear that by providing accurate records, they will attract excessive attention from the tax authorities. As a result, their financial disclosures may not always reflect reality.

NGOs' financial management systems have noticeably improved and more NGOs have effective systems in place.

ADVOCACY: 3.4



Many NGOs take part in decision making at the community and regional levels; during 2009 they became more active at the national level and started pressing for reforms. National government agencies began recognizing NGOs' capacities to contribute to the decision-making process, but do not yet involve them systematically.

NGOs make regular, substantive contributions to legislation and ongoing policy and political issues. NGOs were able to turn a very negative draft of the Freedom of Information Law into a progressive piece of legislation by working in close collaboration with the National Assembly and Ministry of Justice. The prime minister invited NGOs to participate in discussion of the Anti-Corruption Strategy and accepted their suggestions. The Ministry of Education established a public monitoring group for boarding schools for special needs students and invited specialized NGOs to participate. The Office of the Prosecutor General established public consultation groups with broad NGO participation.

A noteworthy advocacy success in 2009 was NGOs' prevention of the passage of controversial amendments to the NGO Law proposed by the Ministry of Justice. On November 26, the Justice Ministry, at the urging of NGO representatives, several MPs, and the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights, agreed to table the controversial amendments to the NGO Law and restart the process to include public consultations. The Justice Ministry made an unprecedented public acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the process. A coalition of NGOs developed a coordinated approach prior to the parliamentary hearing on the draft amendments, and produced materials for journalists, MPs and attendees of the hearing (available at www.armeniango.net).

At the end of 2008, a group of sixty organizations formed a collaborative network to work with the National Assembly. In December 2009, the NGO Araza, which coordinates the network, initiated a discussion on the 2010 state budget involving around forty NGOs and government officials, MPs and Central Bank representatives. The government asked the NGOs to present recommendations and to work with authorities on the 2011 budget. The network will monitor the approved 2010 state budget and use its budget performance report to begin organizing parliamentary hearings on state expenditures in early 2010. Issue-based NGOs working in the social services sector, health care, consumer rights and other fields contributed to the budget discussion.

At the same time, ongoing activities began bearing fruit. A full package of recommendations on the country's mental health legislation, proposed by the Mental Health Foundation of Armenia in 2006, was fully approved in 2009.

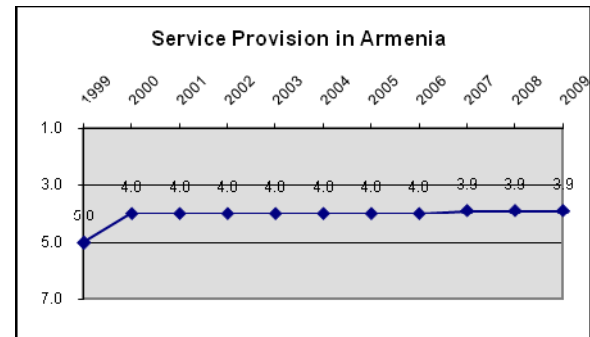
Municipal government bodies were active in

soliciting NGO input on policy and program implementation. After the successful adoption of social partnership policies and budget allocations in seventeen cities, another three municipalities made local budget disbursements to NGOs. Local government agencies in these cities sought NGO participation in grant selection committees.

SERVICE PROVISION: 3.9

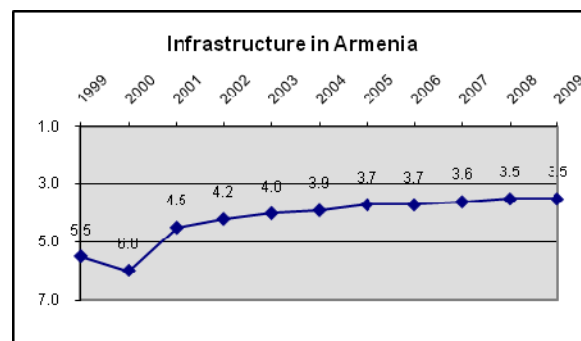
Service provision by NGOs continues to grow and to improve in quality and transparency, including financial reporting and equitable access to services and commodities. NGO services include soup kitchens, medical assistance to the elderly and vulnerable, legal advising, capacity building and grant management. NGO services enjoy broad public recognition.

The National Assembly and some cabinet ministries demonstrated interest in technical and policy advice provided by the NGO network coordinated by Araza. The government has begun showing more recognition and support of NGOs through providing grants and contracts. The Protection of Consumer Rights NGO signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture to conduct monitoring of resellers and importers of food items.



To some extent, NGOs are developing social partnerships with national ministries. After the appointment of the new cabinet and at the urging of the new prime minister, ministries began tapping into the wealth of NGO expertise. Examples of areas where the government took advantage of NGO capacity include anti-corruption measures, development of the legal environment governing service provision, and approaches to the economic crisis.

INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.5



Intermediary support organizations (ISOs) operate throughout Armenia with donor funding, and continue to bolster their service portfolios. ISOs provide quality services with the support of

UNDP, OSI, and the EU. ISOs' client bases diversified to include small businesses, local governments, international organizations, and Armenian diaspora entities. USAID-supported ISOs were certified as U.S. government contracting-compatible organizations, and they continued to increase their service revenues.

NGO coalitions have become easier to build now that NGOs have a better understanding of the benefits of having coalitions and networks, partly as a result of continued capacity building. While previously donors may have conditioned support by requiring coalition building, efforts from within the NGO sector suggest that NGOs

are coming together at their own initiative. During 2009 NGOs formed coalitions around business advocacy, elections, disability issues, and amendments to the NGO Law. Although

coalition initiatives are gradually less donor-driven, their sustainability still depends greatly on donor funding.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.9

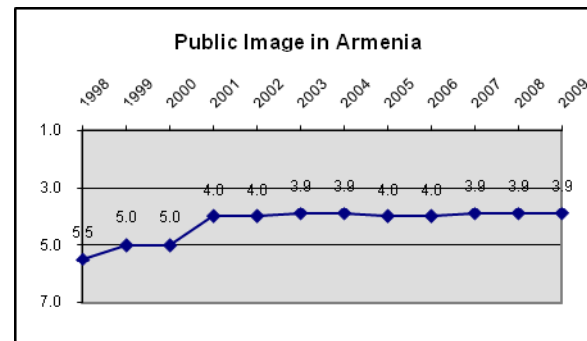
Media coverage of NGOs has improved, as has the public perception of NGOs, especially within the business community. Many NGOs managed to establish more collaborative media relationships through proactively engaging the media in their issues and taking a more professional approach to the media. A larger number of organizations have long-term PR plans, press kits, media databases and other tools for long-term engagement with media outlets. The public perception of NGOs' involvement in the Yerevan elections fell short of the generally positive trend throughout the year, largely as a result of contentious observation efforts in specific communities and a general election fatigue. In general, media coverage is more positive in major cities, including Yerevan and the regional centers of Lori and Kapan.

Environmental protection coalitions such as EcoLur and other advocacy groups began taking a more active role in representing themselves by producing audio-video materials, which they posted on social networking sites and their own websites. An increased number of citizens accessed these materials thanks to the availability of mobile Internet access. NGOs continue to engage in self-censorship, driven by a fear of being politically persecuted or punished through methods such as denial of registration or excessive tax or financial audits. Generally NGOs continue to conduct public relations in a reactive mode, rather than proactively building relationships.

The government's perception of NGOs has improved and government entities recognize that NGOs can be an asset in their policy agendas, as

evidenced by greater efforts to turn NGOs into GONGOs or PONGOs (NGOs created or co-opted by political parties). Prime Minister Sarskisian actively participated in an event organized by Freedom of Information Center (FOICA) in September, and the center used this fact to generate greater interest in its activities.

NGOs lack effective self-regulation and publish annual reports only in isolated cases. Some NGOs such as Internews Armenia, Protection of Consumers Rights, and Transparency International initiated limited reporting and financial disclosures on their websites and in publications. As a trend, however, self-reporting was sporadic. NGOs operate in a regulatory vacuum in which members, beneficiaries and public authorities demand accountability only in the pursuit of politically motivated objectives. At the end of the year, however, with the pending push to place a new layer of accountability on the NGO sector, NGOs themselves began vocalizing the need for greater transparency.



AZERBAIJAN



Capital: Baku

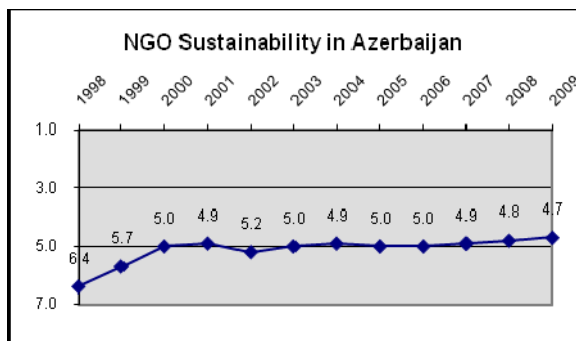
Polity: Republic

Population: 8,303,512 (July 2010 est.)

GDP per capita (PPP): \$10,400 (2009 est.)

NGO SUSTAINABILITY: 4.7

In 2009 NGOs remained active in their efforts to mobilize their constituencies, engage in policy dialogue, monitor and evaluate government effectiveness, and improve service delivery in communities. Government and NGO figures for the exact number of registered NGOs vary from 2,600 to 3,220. Most sources agree that only 70–80 percent of registered NGOs are active.



Despite progress in certain areas, the NGO sector faces restrictions due to latent government interference, especially during election periods. In some cases, local officials attempt to control the activities of NGOs and create obstacles if NGOs fail to inform authorities in advance about their activities. The majority of NGOs are still

dependent on funding from international donors, although many are making serious attempts to diversify their sources of funding.

The Council on State Support to NGOs (the State NGO Council) is demonstrating a strong willingness to cooperate with foreign organizations on adopting international best practices, and receives substantial technical assistance from various donors. In the first two years of its activity the council allocated a total of \$4 million in grant assistance to 430 NGOs on a competitive basis.

In some cases officials required NGOs to change their charters, denied registration with limited explanation, and demanded multiple submissions of registration documents. NGO representatives from distant regions have to travel to Baku for registration-related proceedings. International and local NGOs combined efforts to create a more favorable legal environment for the development of the NGO sector. The Law on Volunteers was adopted in July.

NGO experts are frequently invited to debates on legislation and issues of concern to society. NGOs demonstrated their capacity for influencing the legislative process. A group of active NGOs created the Civil Society Defense

Committee when parliament was preparing to vote on a series of controversial amendments to the NGO Law. As a result of their efforts, the final version of the NGO Law represented a significant improvement over the initial draft

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 4.7

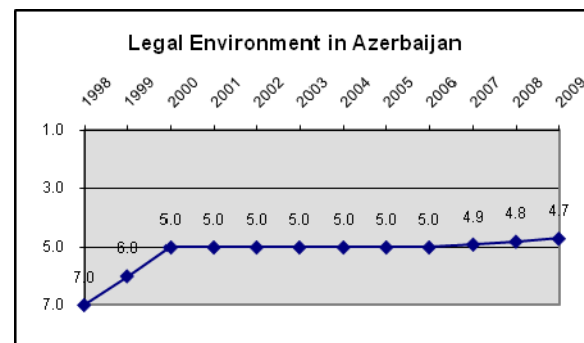
Thanks to the joint efforts of the international community and NGO activists, many restrictive provisions were removed from the draft NGO Law before its adoption on June 30. These included significant fines for NGO managers for infractions, and for individuals or legal entities “speaking or acting” on behalf of an unregistered NGO. The law also reduced the required minimum capital for foundations from 50,000 AZN to 10,000 AZN (\$62,300 to \$12,500), and retained the legal right of foreigners living in Azerbaijan to establish NGOs.

Several provisions of the amended NGO Law are of concern to NGOs. The law introduces new financial reporting requirements that may impose a substantial administrative burden on NGOs. It also specifies that foreign NGOs may only operate in Azerbaijan on the basis of an agreement negotiated with a government agency, but does not provide clear criteria for the agreement.

The NGO registration process remained burdensome and there were some lengthy delays in registration at the Ministry of Justice. A total of 119 NGOs were registered in 2009. NGOs and their representatives are allowed to operate freely, without harassment by the central government, unless they demonstrate serious criticism of the government or its actions or implement projects that the government does not like. No cases of NGOs being dissolved were reported in 2009.

NGOs are exempt from income tax on all revenues received from grants, gratuitous transfers, membership fees, and charitable contributions. Certain supplies and imports are exempt from VAT. Local NGOs pay 22 percent of their consolidated payroll to the State Fund of

Social Insurance. If a bilateral agreement exists between Azerbaijan and a donor country, the donor’s NGO grantees are exempted from this tax. NGO employees are required to pay income tax and social insurance tax on their salaries.



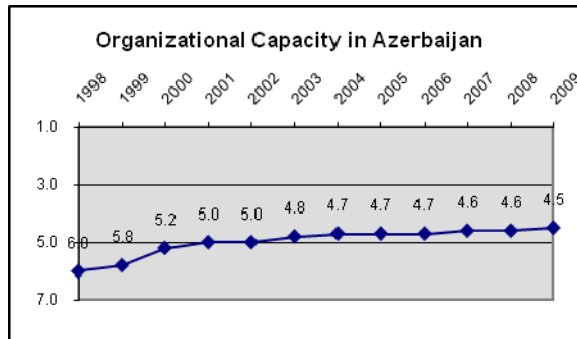
A December 25 presidential decree instructed that NGOs must register grants with the Ministry of Justice before making any transactions with grant funds. New amendments to Article 223-1 of the Administrative Code were enacted in February, which increased the fine for failure to submit a copy of each grant contract to the Ministry of Justice from 50AZN (\$62) to between 1,000–2,500AZN (\$1,240–\$3,100). Some NGOs think that this will make NGOs more responsible in terms of reporting, while others consider the amendment a tool for strengthening governmental control over NGOs.

The new Law on Voluntary Activity adopted in June addressed multiple problems faced by volunteers and the NGOs that host them. Before the adoption of this law, the laws did not contain the concept of voluntary work and even contained sanctions for the use of labor without a labor contract. The new law defines the areas in which volunteers may work (such as legal and cultural education, environmental protection, and provision of assistance to vulnerable groups)

and enumerates the rights and duties of volunteers and hosting organizations.

NGOs are allowed to compete for government tenders, but this mechanism needs improvement.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.5



NGOs are becoming more skillful in constituency outreach. Over the course of the year NGOs organized workshops and conferences on issues relevant for Azerbaijan. The number of NGOs capable of governing themselves and organizing their work in a structured manner is increasing. More NGOs restructured their internal management and expressed interest in adopting international best practices, though this was also driven by donor requirements.

More NGOs are becoming focused on well-defined missions, although some continue to engage in activities outside of their missions to secure grants. NGOs continue to be somewhat weak in their strategic planning. Some NGO leaders lack adequate training in strategic

management and are only able to plan for short-term activities.

Most NGOs have permanent access to basic office equipment, although rural-based organizations still face difficulties in this regard. The State NGO Council is trying to mitigate this problem by funding equipment needs for almost all of its 430 grantees.

Many NGOs improved their reporting skills and expanded access to information about their programs through their websites and frequent public presentations. Few NGOs make their financial information available to the public.

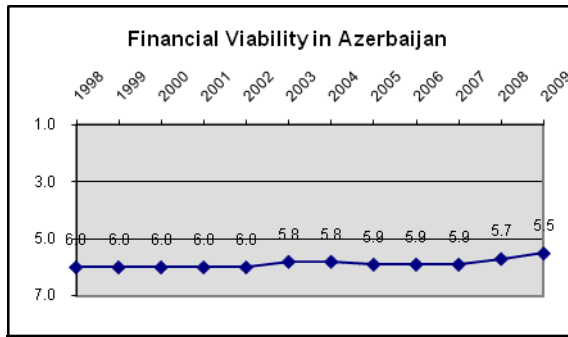
Volunteers are recruited and engaged on a much broader scale in NGO activities. Few NGOs can afford to employ permanent staff. In some cases NGOs recruit employees based on the immediate demands of current projects and grants. Some NGOs that secured long-term donor support worked towards reducing personnel turnover, complaining that employees leave to work for international organizations, embassies or private companies because of higher salaries and opportunities for career development.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.5

NGOs actively submit project proposals to local businesses, the State NGO Council, ministries and other government agencies. The State NGO Council is funded from state monetary reserves and is developing partnerships with bilateral and multilateral donors to sustain long-term public financing. The government plans to disburse \$3.5 million in grants to NGOs in 2010.

Barriers to the growth of local philanthropy include a lack of understanding about the concept of social responsibility, absence of tax

incentives, and companies' lack of specific goals, strategies, and capacity. Local businesses prefer to continue established partnerships with a limited number of NGOs. As in previous years, local businesses created endowments for the families of victims of the Karabakh war, gave food to disadvantaged people, and organized Novruz and New Year celebrations and concerts for orphans and disadvantaged children. Some foreign oil companies and joint ventures are successfully cooperating with local NGOs.



Some NGOs that maintain stable donor partnerships have good financial management policies, but many NGOs, especially in the regions, do not. In February the Ministry of Finance approved the National Accounting Standards for NGOs, Municipalities and Private Enterprises, which are in full compliance with

ADVOCACY: 4.6

NGOs demonstrated improved skills in building coalitions to respond to the changing needs of their communities. Advocacy coalitions successfully worked on a number of important issues. A coalition led by the Citizen Labor Rights Protection League began an advocacy campaign designed to improve the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Corruption. The Economic Research Center (ERC) conducted its annual calculation of the consumer price index and shared its results with key government ministries. ERC's findings provide reliable data on the inflation rate and help the government to strengthen its anti-inflation policy. The Azerbaijan Marketing Society leads an advocacy campaign aimed at increasing knowledge of the WTO accession process among business leaders.

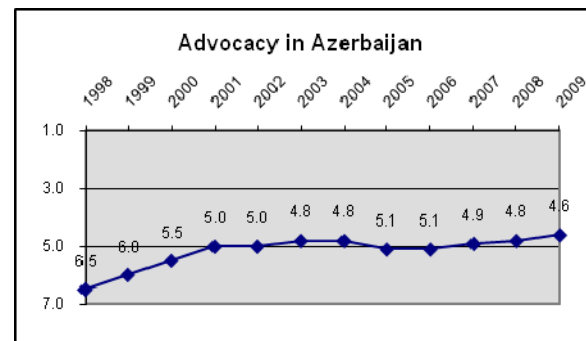
The law allows NGOs and coalitions to work on legislative initiatives and present them to parliament through MPs or by collecting 40,000 signatures; NGOs may present proposals or recommendations directly to parliament. The Center for Economic and Social Development (CESD) presented policy recommendations on the tax system, which parliament approved in June. CESD experts drafted an anti-financial crisis concept and proposed it to the

internationally accepted standards. In July, parliament set the deadline for the transition to the new system by June 2010. The Ministry of Finance is working closely with NGOs like the Young Accountants Union to prepare practical recommendations on the application of the new standards. OSI, USAID and the State NGO Council are funding programs to train NGOs in financial management.

NGOs complain that it is difficult to retain professional accountants. Qualified and experienced bookkeepers prefer to work in private companies. Most NGOs cannot afford to hire an external auditor unless this is required and funded by the donor.

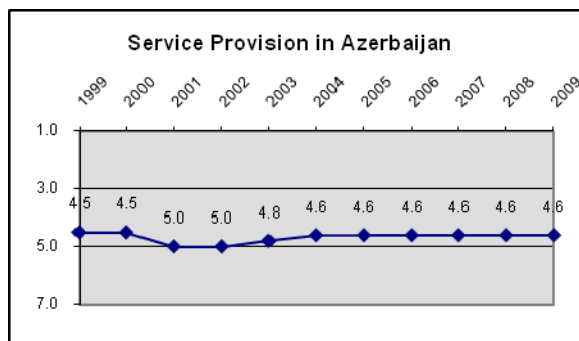
government. Some ministries have already applied policy recommendations from the concept paper.

In June a group of active NGOs created the Civil Society Defense Committee, with almost sixty members, in order to protest draft amendments to the NGO Law which had the potential to undermine civil society development. The government took into consideration most of the committee's recommendations.



The Independent Consumers' Union began implementing an advocacy program in five regions aimed at strengthening the capacity of municipalities and supporting participatory practices such as public debates and budget hearings.

SERVICE PROVISION: 4.6



NGOs continue to organize and facilitate seminars, workshops, trainings, and public education and awareness projects. The quality and relevance of NGOs' events are improving. More NGOs try to maintain contact with the communities they serve after the completion of projects. NGOs' tendency to build on the success of projects is growing. Some NGOs try to register as resource centers upon program completion in order to perpetuate their services.

Public recognition of NGOs' services is growing. NGO experts are often invited to

prepare recommendations for the development of state programs. Government officials and private companies are interested in research conducted by NGOs, although they rarely solicit specialized policy research from NGOs. A few NGOs charge fees for their services, although this is not a widespread practice. NGOs provide free services with donor support, such as legal services to socially disadvantaged segments of the population. Fee-based services include training in computer skills, English language, and accounting.

The government continues to provide grants to NGOs to enable them to offer services to their communities and clients. The priority areas for the NGO Council's 2010 grant program are protection of human rights, environment and health, support of socioeconomic development of rural areas, access to education for vulnerable children, and institutional development of civil society organizations.

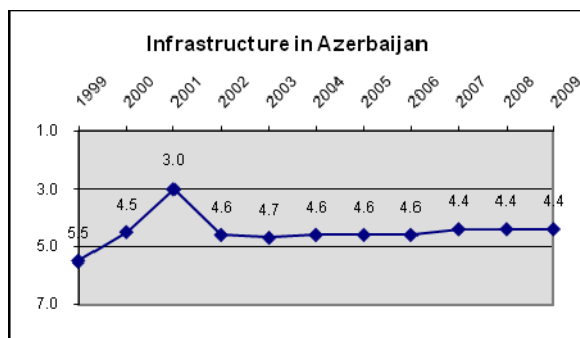
INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.4

The number of local trainers is insufficient to meet the needs of NGOs. The Youth Education Center, the National NGO Forum, and Youth for Development are among the organizations with good training programs for NGOs. International organizations are helping NGOs to compile quality training materials and adapt them to local needs. Training materials on NGO management, project design, proposal writing, advocacy techniques, and civic engagement are available in Azerbaijani. NGOs in Baku and the regions organized seminars on topics relevant to the development of the NGO sector, such as youth and civil society and the media's role in the development of the third sector.

UNDP and the State NGO Council signed an agreement on strengthening the management capacity of NGOs. Local trainers will be equipped to organize seminars and workshops in

five regions of Azerbaijan through the resource centers of the National NGO Forum.

Some NGOs cooperate actively with the government. The Ministry of Justice has a public council composed of NGO representatives who have the right to monitor any penitentiary institution and to report directly to the minister. The State Oil Fund and the State Committee of EITI (Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative) invited the Coalition for Increasing Transparency in Extractive Industries to establish a multi-stakeholder group to improve the country's EITI policy implementation. The NGO alliance Call for Health and the Azerbaijan Harm Reduction Network are assisting the parliamentary commission on social affairs in drafting legislative amendments on HIV/AIDS prevention.



A number of NGOs working in the same fields are joining coalitions and operating joint websites.¹ The popular online resource www.resurs.az and the National NGO Forum of Azerbaijan site www.mqfxeber.az provide information on NGO vacancies and trainings as

PUBLIC IMAGE 4.8

In 2009, media coverage of the NGO sector continued to increase. NGOs worked proactively with the mass media, prepared press releases, and organized press conferences. A number of NGOs maintain up-to-date websites.² The new information portal www.qhtxeber.az (NGO News), which provides updates on NGO activities, was launched with the assistance of the State NGO Council.

NGOs are developing relationships with journalists to encourage positive coverage. More donors (including government agencies) require NGOs to develop communication strategies and media relations plans. Newspapers, news agencies and online journals frequently highlight NGO activities, the results of NGO research, and interviews with civil society leaders. Some news agencies cover NGO activities on a regular basis.

The State NGO Council continues to publish its own monthly journal, Civil Society, which it posts on the official council website, www.cssn.gov.az. The State NGO Council began compiling materials to publish a book which will contain information on all successful NGO activities in the country. In December 2009, the presidential administration and the State NGO Council presented awards to the best media agencies covering NGO activities in

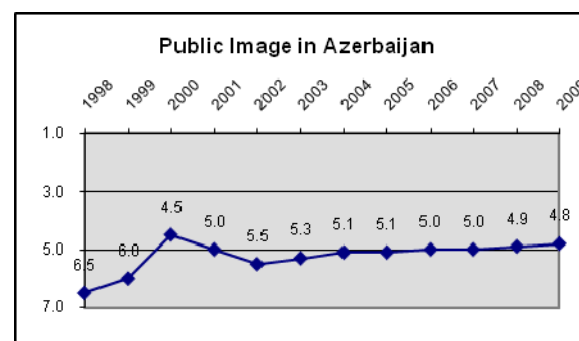
well as a virtual space for debates and exchange of views.

A newly established network of local NGOs, the Alliance for the Development of Municipalities, is actively sharing information about the activities of municipalities, NGO initiatives with local government, and municipal elections.

NGOs released an increasing number of publications, including the Citizen Labor Rights Protection League's handbooks on laws to combat corruption, the Young Accountants' Union publication on best practices in international accounting standards, and the Azerbaijan Marketing Society's business guide to the world trade system.

Azerbaijan in 2009. The government also presented awards for the best local NGO projects.

Government officials consult certain NGOs on issues in their areas of expertise. The Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held its first meeting between students and civil society leaders and plans to organize such gatherings on a regular basis. The authorities often challenge information from some NGOs, namely human rights groups.



The NGO Foundation on Assistance to Entrepreneurship and Market Economy has its own television program, Economic Forum, broadcast twice a month. The program offers discussion with public figures, government officials and NGO leaders on topics such as anti-

corruption, environmental problems, municipal development, and health care.

The NGO sector lacks a code of ethics. Only a few leading NGOs disclose their annual financial reports and are committed to developing transparency practices, although

some improvements were visible in 2009. A coalition of NGOs including Towards Civil Society, Multimedia Information Systems and Technologies Center, and Aran Regional Development Center made public its 2010–2012 strategic plan.