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# WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING EFFORTS IN POST-SOVIET ARMENIA

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After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent Armenia found itself in a precarious situation lacking essential infrastructure and governmental leadership previously supplied by the Kremlin. In the time since, Armenia – as well as numerous other countries of the former Soviet Bloc – has slowly but steadily been on the path to modernization. Unfortunately, however, many aspects of this process are lagging behind, perhaps the most significant being Armenia's rising environmental stressors.

The environmental stress of a country is determined by the amount of municipal solid waste generated, divided by that country's total area.[i] Currently, the environmental stress in Armenia is measured to be 12.9 tons per square kilometer, and is ranked 93rd out of 164 countries.[ii] Additionally, the total environmental pollution of Armenia is estimated at 5,000 to 6,000 tons.[iii] Behind these numbers lie significant hurdles that Armenia must address to correct the nation's current environmental plight.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), major issues that must be remedied include, "inadequate institutions and infrastructure, lack of public-private partnership modalities, lack of knowledge and trust in cooperation between municipalities and the private sector, as well as the lack of awareness on importance of waste management and recycling."<sup>[iv]</sup> It is estimated that by addressing the waste management problem through the implementation of a program to resell recycled plastic waste could alone generate the country an estimated income stream of five to six million US dollars.<sup>[v]</sup> Recently, the United States Agency for International Development along with the UNDP did just that, launching the Collection and Reuse of Plastic Refuse (CRPR).



(<http://www.acopiancenter.am/page.asp?tid=180>)

The impact was immediate and is largely responsible for curbing one of the greatest pollutants of water in Armenia – plastic containers and bags made of terephthalate (PET).[vi] The project applied a, “balanced model of public-private partnership between the private PET recycling companies and local municipalities.”[vii] Within the first 18 months, over 60% of PET waste was sent to recycling.

While the results of this program are a promising start, further progress must not come entirely from the international community, but from within Armenia. With this, it is essential to increase the public awareness amongst Armenians of the detrimental impacts of inadequate waste management. [viii] Fortunately, grass-root organizations have sprung up to quell this issue. The Armenian Environmental Network (AEN) is one such organization. AEN strives to bring together Armenian-Americans and utilize diaspora connections in order to bring awareness and change within Armenia. [ix] Uniquely, this organization has worked with schools, teaching children the importance of environmentalism through changed curriculum. By focusing on the country’s youth, AEN will help spark a generation of environmentally conscious citizens. Although public-private partnerships generated by the CRPR project are vital to environmental progress, organizations like AEN bridge the gap between citizen awareness and participation with the goals and programs enacted by Armenia’s municipalities.

[i] Waste Atlas, *Armenia Country Profile*, [http://www.atlas.d-waste.com/index.php?view=country\\_report&country\\_id=46](http://www.atlas.d-waste.com/index.php?view=country_report&country_id=46) (last visited Aug. 11, 2015).

[ii] *Id.*

[iii] United Nations Development Programme, *Global Compact in Armenia*, <http://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home.html> (last visited Aug. 11, 2015).

[iv] *Id.*

[v] *Id.*

[vi] *USAID and UNDP Launch Plastic Recycling Project in Armenia*, Asbarez (Mar. 17, 2011), <http://asbarez.com/94240/usaid-and-undp-launch-plastic-recycling-project-in-armenia/>.

[vii] United Nations Development Programme, *A Public-Private Partnership in Waste Management Sector*, [http://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/successstories/\\_collection-and-reuse-of-plastic-refusewaste-management-and-publ.html](http://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/successstories/_collection-and-reuse-of-plastic-refusewaste-management-and-publ.html) (last visited Aug. 13, 2015).

[viii] *See Id.*

[ix] Armenian Environmental Network, *History*, <http://www.armenia-environment.org/history/> (last visited Aug. 11, 2015).

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