

Impact Assessment of YMCA Europe  
Roots for Reconciliation Resource Centres

• Amodo

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## Glossary of Terms

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EAY	European Alliance of YMCAs
EPER-HEKS	Swiss Church Aid Agency
Profest	Programme Festival
RfR	Roots for Reconciliation
YERT	YMCA Europe Resource Team
YMCA	Young Mens Christian Association

## 1. Executive Summary

YMCA Europe triggered the development of resource centres/camps in Armenia and Georgia as part of the wider Roots for Reconciliation programme back in 2007. The camps have taken a lot longer than anticipated to complete due to a range of external problems including escalating costs and even international conflict.

Each camp is very different with Camp Aramyan in Armenia now beginning to see growth in sustainable income generation that is changing their dependence on others. Camp Daranak in Armenia is still working hard to generate income and has yet to establish clear business direction and strategy yet has real potential to thrive. Camp Orange in Georgia has just been completed and is well managed with a strong prospect of success.

The development process involved roles for YMCA Europe, for both national YMCAs and for local YMCAs. The management and leadership of all of these partners has failed to establish healthy partnership working and any effective system for monitoring and evaluation. This is particularly relevant to Armenia where the lack of strategic oversight and due diligence by YMCA Europe handed all authority to YMCA Armenia who have subsequently provided very poor project management. In Georgia the decision of the national YMCA to manage the camp development has largely avoided any such problems.

The local YMCAs in Armenia are consequently managing the camps as best they can themselves which has significantly slowed progress and demands urgent support in terms of strategic and business planning.

This report draws five main conclusions:

1. The camp development programme will make a significant contribution to building capacity and sustainability in the YMCA movements in Armenia and Georgia
2. YMCA Europe needs to invest heavily in movement strengthening, to give leadership to YERT, to field groups and to establish a system for assessing national movements
3. YMCA Armenia (National) is in crisis and needs urgent intervention
4. YMCA Europe needs to change to measure outcomes rather than activity and to develop an effective culture of monitoring and evaluation
5. Future development of camps should reflect the strength of partnership possible through clear roles and relationships between regional, national and local YMCA

*“YMCA Europe’s strategy to develop resource centres/camps ...is  
a sound one and one which deserves greater investment”*

## **2. The Task**

### **2.1 Core Objective**

The core objective of this piece of work was the Impact Assessment of the Roots for Reconciliation phase (2007 – 2010). More specifically it was to evaluate the impact of the three new resource centres on the national movements in Armenia and Georgia.

### **2.2 Assessment Guidance**

Initial guidance was given to support the task in terms of the criteria or measures that might be used to make an assessment:

#### **Relevance**

To what extent were the objectives of the project valid? Were the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives? Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the intended impacts and effects?

#### **Effectiveness**

To what extent were the objectives achieved? What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?

#### **Efficiency**

Were activities cost-efficient? Were objectives achieved on time? Was the programme or project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives?

#### **Impact**

What has happened as a result of the programme or project? What real difference has the activity made to the beneficiaries? How many people have been affected?

#### **Sustainability**

To what extent did the benefits of the project continue after donor funding ceased? What were the major factors, which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme or project?

The assessment was further guided to contextualise the development work in the light of the following YMCA Europe strategic priorities

Mission Awareness

Relevant Programmes

Sustainability

### 2.3 Clarification of Final Objectives

This report focuses upon the first phase of the Roots for Reconciliation programme (2007-2010) and more specifically upon the impact of the strategy to create resource centres in Armenia and Georgia.

During the initial working visit to Armenia and Georgia the task was re-defined and focused to serve the following tasks. These three tasks constitute the major themes for this report:

1. To evaluate the strategy of camp development within existing YMCA Europe goals for movement strengthening
2. To assess the impact of the three centres on the respective YMCA movements
3. To consider the current and potential sustainability of the three centres

### 3. Background and Introduction

#### 3.1 YMCA Europe

*“YMCA Europe is a working fellowship to strengthen movements where people grow in body, mind and spirit.”*

Mission Statement

The YMCA is an organisation with a unique structure fed from the ground upwards and yet with an impressive global co-ordination. The World YMCA office (World Alliance of YMCAs), based in Geneva, offers global partnership programmes and represents the organisation at that level ie the United Nations. It brings together the five regional network offices in the global staff team with Canada and USA operating separate strong national networks.

YMCA Europe is a regional support network for the YMCA national movements across that continent. Each national movement is autonomous supporting its own network of autonomous local YMCAs.

This structure creates the opportunity for the YMCA movement to maximise local identity and purpose yet to benefit from all the advantages of being a large global movement. The regional offices allow the organisation to represent, access value and create strategic relationships in mid level structures such as the European Union.

The relationship between YMCA Europe and a national movement is one where the authority lies with the national movement as the organisation is driven from the ground up. In this sense the national movements are in charge voting in the leadership and strategy of the regional body.

However YMCA Europe is responsible for building the capacity of and supporting national movements particularly those which are developing or which are dealing with crisis. In parallel the organisation is responsible for the regional level programme activities including a range of European programme groups and networking events.

It makes sense of these responsibilities through a strategy building upon three pillars:

1. Mission Awareness
2. Institutional Viability
3. Relevant Programmes

Much recent activity within YMCA Europe has focused on Eastern Europe reflecting the priority for the regional movement in terms of capacity building and support. As part of this YMCA Europe has invested much resource in the Caucasus and in particular in Armenia. It is relevant to this report that a key resource for YMCA Europe in this regard is invested in a member of staff Vardan Hambardzumyan

### 3.2 Roots for Reconciliation Programme

The Roots for Reconciliation project was established in 2007 with the objective to strengthen and extend the YMCA Movement in the region of South Caucasus, as a mass-membership, ecumenical network “*standing for the integrity of creation, peace and justice*”.

The project grew through an initial phase stretching from 2007 - 2010 with a budget of €873,000 which was then continued into a second phase to run from 2012 - 2015 with a programme budget of €520,000.

The outwards face of Phase One with the highest profile was the work with over 800 young people (between 2007 - 2011) who were brought together to engage in peace and reconciliation development programmes and who came from not only Armenia, Georgia and Nagorno Karabakh but also from more than 20 other countries from across the globe.

It was less evident yet as important to the project that a major programme of investment was launched in this phase to build the capacity of the national movements involved to offer additional programme with a longer term goal to enhance their sustainability and viability as self sufficient national organisations.

This investment ultimately became focused on three resource centres (commonly referred to as camps), Camps Daranak and Aramyan in Armenia, and Camp Orange in Georgia. The camps could provide a venue for ongoing peace and reconciliation work yet the longer term sustainability of the national movements was the main objective for this investment.

The report will consider in detail:

- a) The impact of the three centres on the respective YMCA movements
- b) The strategy of camp development within existing YMCA Europe goals for movement strengthening
- c) The current and potential sustainability of the three centres



## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 The Process**

This report was drawn together using data gathered and information obtained in the following manner:

- a. Consideration of existing programme documentation and paperwork
- b. Consideration of reports already completed on the Roots for Reconciliation programme
- c. Site visits to the three camps and to the two national movements involved
- d. Interviews with key YMCA stakeholders in Armenia and Georgia
- e. Interviews with stakeholders from YMCA Europe and with partners from both the wider YMCA movement and from outside of the YMCA organisation
- f. Data analysis and literature search

### **4.2 Nagorno Karabakh**

A fourth camp was originally planned in the Roots for Reconciliation development for the YMCA of Nagorno Karabakh. This particular development did not proceed mainly for reasons of difficulties in terms of acquisition of buildings and perceived lack of local financial resources that might enable sustainability.

This report was directed to consider only the three remaining locations where development continued.

### **4.3 Reporting**

The report was submitted by an agreed deadline in early July 2015 along with a presentation format of the key outcomes. A stakeholder event in the autumn of 2015 will consider and discuss the report's findings.

## 5. The YMCA in Armenia and Georgia

### 5.1 YMCA Armenia

The YMCA in Armenia claims an early history in YMCA work during the Ottoman Empire of the late 1880s. Sadly this development was fully terminated during the genocide of the early 20th century. Today the YMCA in Armenia is therefore a young movement with the first work established in 1992 in Ozone. It grew very quickly with several YMCAs starting up through the nineties and the national office opening in 1998. Today it boasts five local YMCAs and two campsites and is a full member of the YMCA Europe family.

YMCA Armenia today states three key programme themes across its work:

1. YMCA is a leader in offering high quality programmes to its communities, while supporting local initiatives designed to enhance its position as a youth-focused organization accessible to all.

*Our programmes enjoy public recognition for their added value and impact  
Long-term relationships with people we serve allow us to develop strong community ties and support for new initiatives*

*The young people are empowered to engage and to take an active role in all phases of our programmes.*

2. YMCA presence is strengthened and expanded in Armenian communities

*Our programmes are sustainable and contribute to capital renewal and enhancement.*

*YMCA mission and programmes are accessible to new communities.*

3. YMCA is a destination for non-profit staff, civic leaders and major funders.

*A vibrant organization with comprehensive workforce and leadership development opportunities, while truly exemplifying an environment of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility*

*YMCA boards are recognised as the best and most reputable in our communities*

*Major donors and philanthropists are engaged and inspired with the work we do.*

The national movement and much of the local YMCA work is sustained by external funding from donors in the USA and Europe. A partner group was established by the wider YMCA organisation to support the local movement in its journey towards sustainability, however this partner group has recently finished its work and no longer operates.

## 5.2 YMCA Georgia

The YMCA in Georgia was also established in the early nineties with the national office the first development closely followed by the first local YMCA in the capital, Tbilisi. Today the Georgian YMCA movement comprises four local YMCAs and the national YMCA which also runs the camp centre.

The national office states its goals as follows:

- a) To support the local YMCAs in conducting joint and coordinated activities;
- b) To stimulate the development of the YMCA of Georgia by promoting the strengthening and further extension of the member YMCAs and by encouraging the creation of the YMCA in new areas and locations;
- c) To react to the emerging needs of the community through initiatives, charity actions and programs according to the lifestyle and living standards of the community.

YMCA Georgia is a full member of YMCA Europe and had until recently an active field group supporting its development and growth with members from Norway, USA, Armenia, Germany, Sweden and Ireland. Like Armenia much external support is channelled to the Georgian YMCA from YMCAs in the USA and in Europe.

## 5.3 Sustainability

The YMCA movements in Armenia and Georgia are not currently self sustainable. They do not enjoy any internal country support comparative to that received by other national movements in western Europe. The economies of both countries but especially Armenia are pressed to finance the development required with much industry remaining in decline in the post Soviet era. As such the opportunity to receive and benefit from government funding for the voluntary and charitable sector is not a reliable source of income and can not feature significantly in plans to sustain the work of these two movements.

The reliance therefore upon external funding from YMCA and other NGO partners is an essential element of YMCA work in Eastern Europe. The drive for YMCA Europe has become a search for innovation and creativity in seeking to support the two movements to develop sustainable funding sources through programme and partner programmes. This drive has met with some success as noted by YMCA Europe,

*“It goes without doubt that nowadays both the national and local associations in Caucasus have reached a certain level of maturity and they can and do independently plan, monitor and implement a variety of projects not limited to the support from the partner YMCAs. In some situations (eg the local associations in Spitak, Vanadzor and Vardenis in Armenia) both income generation and grant-seeking have reached to a considerable level.”*

YMCA Europe RfR Programme Proposal

The Roots for Reconciliation initiative provided an opportunity to further invest in capacity building for the longer term through the establishment of a concrete resource with clear potential for longer term income generation.

## **6. The Camps in Armenia and Georgia**

### **6.1 Camps in Armenia**

#### **6.1.1 Camp Daranak**

Camp Daranak was completed as a new build project in 2009, constructed on a 10,000 square metre site on the south eastern shore of Lake Sevan close to the Armenian border with Azerbaijan. The property sits only 800 metres from the water on a raised site offering spectacular views and situated in the national reserve. Originally the camp was designed to be a larger facility but due to financial constraints the completed structure is only two thirds the size of the original plan.

Transport links are poor with the main connecting road providing a significant challenge to vehicle drivers. Buses do navigate this route twice weekly to and from the nearby town of Vardenis, however there is no direct public transportation connection to Yerevan, the capital city.

The site is close to five deprived refugee communities comprising 2,676 residents of whom 429 are children and young people. YMCA partners in the delivery of environmental and summer activity programmes and works with Community Initiative groups established in each village.

The camp is owned and operated by YMCA Vardenis and can accommodate 38 residents in sleeping accommodation on the second floor laid out in large communal bedrooms offering bunk beds with bathroom facilities on the same floor. Groupwork, activity and kitchen/eating spaces are all situated on the first floor.

The original plan was that the centre would be a resource centre largely delivering daytime programmes with groupwork rooms upstairs. It now operates a broader residential programme alongside a community development programme targeting the local refugee communities. Refugees also learn about integration and Armenian culture.

#### **6.1.2 Camp Aramyan**

Camp Aramyan is a refurbished facility which was originally built as a crisis centre following the earthquake of 1988. It was then transformed into Pambak campsite which was established in 1994 and passed to the ownership of the Armenian National YMCA. In 1998 the site was passed on to the local Vanadzor YMCA who now own and operate the facility. The Aramyan family, resident in the USA, provided the core sponsorship for a major renovation which was completed in 2012 after which the site was renamed Camp Aramyan.

Located in the north of Armenia close to the border with Georgia the site sits in the midst of the Lori-Pambak mountains, an ideal place for hiking and camping in the forested hills. The site itself includes a hilltop viewpoint offering spectacular views across the region. It sits above the main connecting road between Armenia and Georgia only 7 kilometres from Vanadzor and with good public transport links further afield.

The camp can now accommodate 40 residents with full training and catering facilities for this size of group housed within a structure extending to 306 square metres. The accommodation is laid out in small bedrooms with washing facilities.

## **6.2 Camps in Georgia**

### **6.2.1 Camp Orange**

Camp Orange sits on the site of a former fruit farm close to the holiday resort of Ureki some 60 kilometres from Batumi on the Black Sea coast. An impressive structure, it sits on the hill above fields of fruit trees with the land extending to include a viewpoint and activity area.

The land is owned and operated by the YMCA of Georgia rather than by a local YMCA. The building includes a range of activity and groupwork spaces alongside office accommodation and toilet/catering facilities on the first floor with bedrooms accommodating some 50 residents in small rooms with separate bathroom facilities on the second. A large veranda graces the front of the building providing a natural gathering place for programme participants.

The facility sits close to a small deprived community and has committed to serve this neighbouring community from the start. This has included offering employment, providing activities and training and engaging the children in centre programmes.

## 7. Discussion

This report has been tasked with exploring the following three questions:

- a) To evaluate the strategy of camp development within existing YMCA Europe goals for movement strengthening
- b) To assess the impact of the three centres on the respective YMCA movements
- c) To consider the current and potential sustainability of the three centres

This section will explore each of these questions with a view to lessons that can be learned to shape future practice. It will feed these lessons into the conclusions that emerge below in Section 8.

### 7.1 Question One

#### **“Evaluate the strategy of camp development within existing YMCA Europe goals for movement strengthening”**

##### 7.1.1 Measuring Outcomes

At the heart of YMCA Europe’s mission lies the challenge of strengthening national YMCA movements....

*“YMCA Europe is a working fellowship to strengthen movements where people grow in body, mind and spirit.”*

YMCA Europe Mission Statement

It converts this mission into practice through three core pillars of YMCA work that undergird all programmes and provide a collective expression of the long experience of the YMCA movement in terms of what creates sustainable and successful organisations. Together these three pillars represent effective movement strengthening:

1. Mission Clarity
2. Institutional Viability
3. Relevant Programmes

The current YMCA Europe strategy stretches from 2011 to 2016 and includes a commitment to build on the above three pillars but to deliver its programme of work through three priorities:

- a) Mission Awareness - Advocacy - Representation
- b) Relevant Programmes
- c) Sustainability

Within this strategy stretching from 2011-2016 Movement Strengthening does not feature specifically although it can be deemed to come in under the title 'Sustainability' where it states,

*“Viable YMCAs are able to constantly generate the necessary resources to run their programmes.”*

There is no specific mention or objective noted in terms of camp development other than a general commitment to institutional viability. However it does make a specific reference to existing camps as follows:

*“To consolidate and optimise the existing facilities, educational centres, youth hostels, hotels, holiday centres and camps across Europe considering it as a network and a resource for our common movement and for potential partners”*

The strategy of building resource centres/camps in Eastern Europe seems therefore to have emerged largely from the Roots for Reconciliation programme driven by YMCA Europe and national YMCA staff working in Eastern Europe.

It has developed as a programme development theme and in conversation with funding partners and the outcomes or original objectives of the camp development for YMCA Europe are unclear. The concept of building resource centres/camps and of enhancing sustainability is sound; however the planning and evaluation processes are not.

In the original project proposal for Roots for Reconciliation it stated clearly that...

*“The overall project administration, as well as project monitoring and evaluation will be the responsibility of the EAY. To this end the existing systems will be utilised for effective project monitoring and evaluation.*

*Namely:*

*The Movement Development Group (particularly the Partner Group for Armenia and Field Group for Georgia) in cooperation with the corresponding key staff will sum up general project monitoring and evaluation.*

*The EAY field staff will be responsible for the overall project management, including tasks on monitoring visits, progress and final reporting.”*



This clearly committed YMCA Europe to effective monitoring and evaluation of the programme with the field groups playing a key role. Within the Roots for Reconciliation programme there were several documents produced for different partners and funders that set out what was intended in the development of the programme and what goals were to be achieved. These largely related to the engagement of young people in the peace-building programme and included targets and programme goals.

The element of building the resource centres does not feature in the paperwork in terms of measureable outcomes. There is a commitment to build four (subsequently changed to three) resource centre/camps and there is mention of sustainable development of the YMCA movements as a goal but no evidence of a thought process as to what this would look like for the national movement if successful.

Examples of how impact was anticipated in the original proposal include,

*“...this programme is initiated by the EAY to further mainstream their growth as self-sustaining and democratic YMCA associations”*

*“...at least 4 YMCA Resource Centres (with residential facilities) are operational to offer day or camping services to youth from marginalized groups and communities”*

with more specific goals stated including ...

*“...The programme management team in general, the Movement Coordinators in particular, will be challenged to put in place adequate regional networking which will especially promote cross-border marketing of those sites.”*

These statements tend to be written by YMCA Europe as broad goals which can then be difficult to measure in any focused way. YMCA Europe staff state the three main goals for the resource centres as:

1. To enable sustainability for the national YMCA movements
2. To provide enhanced programme provision to deprived communities
3. To provide leadership development programmes to young people

It is very important that YMCA Europe clarifies its aims and objectives for future programmes in a more precise and measureable way so that success and value for money can be evaluated and delivery can be improved.

This can either simply follow the SMART objectives definition,

- *Specific – target a specific area for improvement.*
- *Measurable – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.*
- *Assignable – specify who will do it.*

- *Realistic – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.*
- *Time-related – specify when the result(s) can be achieved.*

...or it could be achieved through developing an understanding of outcomes measurement. This would entail a good understanding of the difference between a goal/objective and an outcome and would seek to establish and agree specific and measureable outcomes for each programme.

The benefits of outcome measurement are that managers need to have the courage and confidence in YMCA work to state clearly what will have happened as a result of a programme rather than how the programme will be delivered or what they intend to do. This focuses the organisation on impact rather than process, on the resulting change rather than on the activity itself. It highlights programme that can achieve activity goals yet has no significant impact as a result. This then impacts upon programme design as it requires design to think more thoroughly about how programme content will produce actual change.

It can be daunting to set clear outcomes at the outset as these will need to be measured and the result will reflect directly on the performance of the organisation. However YMCA Europe needs to have courage to do this better, in confidence that the organisation has the expertise and ability to deliver and in confidence that failure should be embraced and explored to underwrite further learning and improved performance in the future.

### 7.1.2 YMCA Europe Strategy for Movement Strengthening

It may be relevant to ask immediately whether the camp development work is a YMCA Europe Strategy as the current strategy (2011-2016) makes no reference to it. For this report however it will be viewed as part of YMCA Europe strategy as the key architect was a member of the YMCA Europe staff team.

The development of resource centres/camps by YMCA Europe must sit within a wider commitment to movement strengthening. This core area of YMCA work cascades down from the World Alliance of YMCAs whose first statement of purpose is that it...

*“...strengthens the capacity of national YMCA movements”*

Within YMCA Europe the strategy for movement strengthening is difficult to identify. YMCA Europe is clearly committed to supporting national movements to become stronger and more effective however how they plan to go about this to achieve movement strengthening remains unclear.

There is no doubt that the two remaining priorities of the current strategy, Mission Awareness and Relevant Programmes, both contribute in ways to building stronger movements. What seems to be missing is any means to measure or break down just exactly what elements are

involved in strengthening a national YMCA movement. If an organisation does not clarify the steps on a journey how can it evaluate how far it has come on that journey? Within the work on Institutional Viability there are six questions that can be addressed to a national movement yet these are not focused sufficiently on organisational strengths and capacity to produce any reliable measure.

It may be helpful to begin to identify some of the steps that might be involved in movement strengthening to confirm that this would indeed be possible. This process can name certain key elements of a strong movement that can then be broken down to identify smaller parts. These may include things like Leadership of the organisation; Purpose (including planning and mission and vision); Staffing and Infrastructure would include the systems and skills in place; Resource Management and Programme Delivery. Each would need to clarify the separate role and task of the local and national YMCA.

Section 7.2.1 below starts to identify aspects of early set-up of a national movement in things like systems and structures and networks that clarify the roles and responsibilities of various YMCA stakeholders and that create ways of working together and supporting each other to thrive.

Movement strengthening will involve this element of internal processes and structures that can be evaluated using an audit tool and that make sure that the organisation works well with its local associations. It will also include a mapping of the journey of other movements as they explore how they grew stronger and what elements of that journey were significant and essential. Developing this would trigger an excellent consultative exercise for YMCA Europe involving a group of skilled national movements.

In this way it is entirely possible to draw together a journey mapping what it looks like to grow from a new movement to become a strong sustainable movement. Each element of the journey would be broken down to create steps or stages of development and the whole process would be a long term plan. It would also be important to note that every movement would be different, would work within different constraints and circumstances and that at some point on the journey organisations will fall into crisis and lose momentum. Such assessment requires YMCA Europe to be more intentional and robust in its direction of and guidance to national movements.

It would however provide YMCA Europe with a measure of stage of journey for any one movement. It would provide a check for stronger movements to consider where they might improve and it should provide a staged process so that a newly developing movement can address issues in sequence and grow in the right manner.

This suggestion is not meant to be prescriptive but to provide a guidance template or framework that can offer a general overview and a staged process to developing movements and a measure to those involved in movement strengthening. This would fill a gap in YMCA Europe planning and evaluation processes and is an idea further developed later in this section.

### 7.1.3 Broader strategy under Movement Strengthening

As this report seeks to evaluate the development of resource centres/camps as part of a wider Movement Strengthening process it is important to clarify that wider strategy.

We have already established the wider commitment of the YMCA organisation at World and European level to the concept of movement strengthening. We have established that the current YMCA Europe strategy does not focus on movement strengthening in its language yet undoubtedly delivers elements that contribute towards this goal. Within the priority of Sustainability it centres around Resource Mobilisation and Institutional Viability. Within the goal of Institutional Viability there is one outreach programme to strengthen national movements called the YERT programme. If we recognise the contribution of Relevant Programmes and Mission Awareness to movement strengthening are there other more specific or intentional activities that could be seen as a YMCA Europe movement strengthening strategy?

There are other YMCA Europe programmes that can be seen as part of a movement strengthening process and which alongside the resource centre/camp development feel much more intentional about building stronger YMCA movements. These include the YERT programme mentioned above but also the Field and Partner groups both of which aspire to support a national movement to grow and flourish.

As this report moves to consider the resource centre/camp development initiative within the wider strategy of movement strengthening it may be helpful to briefly consider the effectiveness of these two programmes:

#### a) YMCA Europe Resource Team

The YMCA Europe strategy commits...

*“To continue and develop the YMCA Europe Resource Team to assist National Movements in analysing their own institutional status to assist with their growth”*

More specifically its purpose is stated as...

*“The purpose of YERT is to assist National Movements in reflecting on their strengths to further develop their capacity and efficiency.”*

The YERT brings together skills and experience from across the international YMCA movement to focus on a national YMCA organisation in order to support it and to offer guidance as to how it might move further along the road towards movement strengthening.

This is an excellent concept drawing on and sharing a wealth of expertise available free of

charge from within the greater YMCA organisation. In 2014 two YERTs completed visits to Lithuania and a follow-up visit to Portugal. Teams were very limited in numbers with only five YERT volunteers currently active and four of those from western Europe.

It remains vague as to how the YERT teams judge the need for a team and how they progress a national movement along a journey towards becoming a strong and stable movement. The YERT idea is a very strong one yet it needs a more precise framework to follow and a greater sense of purpose and process to create the interest and commitment to it from a wider group of staff/volunteers. It is important that YERT visits are conducted as a stronger team recruiting the various skills appropriate for the stage of that national movement and a group approach that can explore together the best solutions and guidance.

The YERT programme is a strong concept and the resources, both people and skills, are available within the international YMCA movement. However the operation of the programme is very weak at present not only in terms of marketing and recruitment but more so in terms of the process that could be so much more focused and intentional with a clear measure of stage of development and progress for a national movement.

There is talk of YERT providing marketing support to YMCA Georgia at Camp Orange. It would be wise for YMCA Europe to restructure YERT around a specific programme offering an assessment, support and advisory service to national movements with the goal of improving their practice and increasing their sustainability. Isolated pieces of work would be better addressed by individuals, leaving the YERT brand to strengthen and grow as a wider national movement support programme.

#### **b) Field and Partner Groups**

These groups are a collection of representatives from different partner countries who commit to support that targeted national movement to grow and thrive over an extended period of time. Field groups are established by YMCA Europe whilst Partner Groups are set up by the national movement themselves.

The field groups were written in to play a key role in the monitoring and evaluation of the Roots for Reconciliation programme,

*“The Movement Development Group (particularly the Partner Group for Armenia and Field Group for Georgia) in cooperation with the corresponding key staff will sum up general project monitoring and evaluation”*

RfR Original Project Proposal

Field groups remain a key part of the movement strengthening strategy of YMCA Europe today yet are only operational in three countries, Ukraine, Belarus and Kosovo. In Armenia the group was first established as a partner group which then ceased to exist after the Dutch chairperson resigned. The chairperson of the Georgian field group also resigned and that group closed down. No initiative was taken to renew the groups and no evidence exists of any evaluation of the process nor of the need for renewal. The role shaped for the field groups in the monitoring and evaluation of the Roots for Reconciliation programme including

the camps was therefore lost and was not replaced.

The wider strategy for field and partner groups seems to be falling apart with little or no leadership from the centre. The view from key partners in the field group process is that partners have simply got tired and as a result that attendance became sporadic leading to closure. This is a very poor example of the management of a key part of YMCA Europe strategy. It is a situation that demands leadership both in those countries where field and partner groups have closed without strategic thought or evaluation and for the three remaining groups so that they understand their role, the vision of YMCA Europe and the support they can receive.

*“The wider strategy for field and partner groups seems to be falling apart with little or no leadership from the centre.”*

YMCA Europe recognises that this is a support programme that is not working yet there is no strategy to take decisions on the remaining groups or to give leadership to them. Other partners have called on YMCA Europe to step up to manage this agenda and it is important that this happens.

Where field and partner groups close because they do not work well it suggests that the need for support remains, that a gap is emerging and that something else needs to be put in place.

### **c) Camp Development**

Camping is a core YMCA activity and a part of the brand. From summer camps in the United States to YMCA Scouts to festivals in Eastern and Northern Europe, camps make up a significant percentage of YMCA activity across the globe.

This quantity inevitably brings a high level of quality with it and the reputation of the organisation around caring for children and young people and for healthy development is second to none. TV and films, books and plays all refer regularly to life that includes YMCA camping, kids programmes and accommodation making this a truly international brand. The potential for each YMCA to learn from another further reinforces this idea with partnerships between Spitak YMCA and the Swiss YMCA, between USA camps and Georgia YMCA good examples of this shared learning.

Building on this brand recognition by developing camps in Armenia and Georgia is a strong idea assuming the capacity to deliver and the demand for services. How did YMCA Europe think about these two essential elements prior to the proposal?

#### **i) Demand for Services**

This question is not a difficult one as competition in the camping industry, though it exists in Armenia and Georgia, is not sufficiently strong to deny a market for the service to YMCA. The national and local YMCA movements in Armenia and Georgia were all aware of ‘the competition’ and of opportunity to grow their service to become sustainable. Connecting to serve demand for the service was more about the selection of location than about a question

of demand.

## ii) Capacity to Deliver

Camp Orange in Georgia is operated by the Georgian national movement which clearly has the skills and ability to make this become a real success. In order to achieve this however YMCA Georgia dedicated significant time from their CEO to manage the development which had an inevitable impact on the host organisation. In terms of capacity to deliver there is no question that in Georgia this has been well thought through and delivered.

In Armenia one of the camps was a refurbishment project so the local YMCA, Vanadzor YMCA, which owned the original camp naturally retained ownership of that site. This local YMCA had good previous experience of running a camp and capacity was less of a challenge.

The second Armenian campsite at Daranak was handed over to the local YMCA to manage. Vardenis YMCA was an established local association with a strong activity programme and keen to grow and develop.

The question of capacity to deliver for YMCA Europe is one relating to the relative national movements as YMCA Europe passed oversight and authority for the camp development to these colleagues who in turn took decisions about retaining control or passing on control of the development to local YMCA partners.

For YMCA Europe the challenge is .....

How much due diligence did they undertake prior to agreeing to pass this authority across?

Passing this to the national movements suggests a real confidence that they had the capacity and skills to effectively manage this responsibility. This report explores in the following section how the national movements decided to either retain responsibility for the camp development as in the case of YMCA Georgia or to pass this on to local YMCAs as in the case of YMCA Armenia. Here we explore YMCA Europe's part in this.

YMCA Europe was the applicant for significant parts of the funding package for the camps. This gave responsibility to YMCA Europe to retain the primary oversight for effective spend of this resource on the development agreed with the funder in the project proposal. When YMCA Europe passed this resource on to the national movements for delivery that same responsibility remained with YMCA Europe to report back to the funders and to monitor the spend. It just meant that YMCA Europe were not the delivery agent.

In this sense YMCA Europe would be expected to set in place a system of monitoring the spend and of ensuring that it adhered to what the funders had agreed. This system would need to have a process in place should partners fail to deliver the development as planned. YMCA Europe would be monitoring the stages of development from a distance to ensure that it would achieve the outcomes that they had used to persuade funders to support the

project.

It is this handover and monitoring process, that was the responsibility of YMCA Europe, that raises some questions. For example...

### **Design of Camp Daranak**

YMCA Europe did excellent work in nurturing and developing proposals with the Swiss funder EPER-HEKS to get them to the point where they invested heavily in the camp development programme. They funded the build of Camp Daranak in Armenia to the tune of €75,000 to operate as a resource centre.

At a later stage when the centre was built Camp Daranak decided to switch to market the centre as a camp. This was a critical moment as the original design of the centre was fit for a different purpose and the accommodation was not laid out in a way that would make it easy to serve different groups of guests. The funder expected the centre to use the upstairs rooms as groupwork rooms in operating as a resource centre rather than as bedrooms when operating as a camp.

There was also a serious question about sustainability within the strategy to operate as a resource centre as this directed Camp Daranak to serve the refugee populations living close to the Lake Sevan site yet these participants were not in any position to pay for services. This was a critical point and decision time for Daranak that would have consequences for the future success of the project.

EPER-HEKS had by this time been persuaded to fund a second phase of work at Camp Daranak with the expectation of the resource centre serving the local refugee communities in mind. The money was passed to YMCA Armenia to fund Camp Daranak.

At this point the decision was taken by YMCA Armenia to fund a pipeline project at Lake Sevan which was a project to provide a piped drinking water supply to the refugee villages.

EPER-HEKS clearly had expectations and hopes that YMCA Armenia would invest further in the resource centre/camp at Daranak in Phase II. As the money was used for the pipeline project instead (which EPER-HEKS reluctantly agreed to), they subsequently withdrew from the relationship and no further monies were forthcoming. There are real questions about managing the funding relationship and about the respective roles of YMCA Europe and YMCA Armenia here.

Tom Valentine from the YMCA of the USA predicted early in the camp development process that,

*“Making the best use of the CRCs , will require good business planning, marketing and core management skills.”*

It seems clear that as YMCA Europe passed authority for the programme over to YMCA Armenia it failed to complete due diligence or to set in place sufficient processes for effective monitoring of the spend on behalf of the funders. Expectations of YMCA Armenia were, with



hindsight, too high. It is impossible today to uncover just what capacity and ability to manage the project existed several years ago within YMCA Armenia as personnel have changed. However it is perfectly valid to challenge YMCA Europe on what due diligence they completed and what monitoring systems they set in place.

YMCA Europe certainly had a responsibility to monitor and as they signed authority over to national movements they failed to retain a level of authority and agree a process to be triggered if things did not go according to plan. The absence of close monitoring and of any such process meant that when things did not go according to plan or when decisions were taken that YMCA Europe felt were not in the best interests of the project it became impossible for YMCA Europe to intervene. These are lessons to be learned for the future and may have prevented the loss of an excellent funding relationship which itself harms the sustainability of the Armenian YMCA to some extent.

The way YMCA Georgia and YMCA Armenia approached the management and ownership of the respective camps is very different. YMCA Europe's role was to monitor spend and support the two national movements to make effective strategic decisions. This role could have been much stronger.

Some form of steering group or monitoring group focusing solely on the camp development would have solved many of these issues. Perhaps where YMCA Europe embarks on another complex development project such an oversight group would be worth setting in place before delivery with a clearly agreed role and with oversight authority where the direction of the project raises questions.

#### **7.1.4 Income Generation**

The success of YMCA Europe in accessing significant amounts of money from key funders to underwrite the costs of the resource centre/camp development is something worth noting. The budget for the initial three year phase was over half a million euros alone and more importantly YMCA Europe has gained much credibility and ongoing favour with very key funding agencies as a result. A third phase for the Roots for Reconciliation programme is highly likely and the income for YMCA Europe costs is naturally of great interest here too.

Perhaps a secret of success on this project funding was the intimate knowledge of the Armenian movement provided by Vardan Hambarzumyan. Certainly using staff experienced and knowledgeable about the politics, economics and needs of a country will create a very credible funding proposal. This suggests that YMCA Europe would significantly benefit from investing in skilled staff with a real understanding and experience of YMCA work in regional locations.

There is a case to be explored around the development of regional offices. This not in terms of a high cost base but a home office base in certain regions across Europe where regional staff would be based and where a registered YMCA Europe office for that region would be established. Having a formal registered regional office without additional cost would open the door to greater potential to fundraise as making application from that location rather than

through a central office in Prague could be more attractive to funders and would reinforce the local expertise around a funding proposal.

#### 7.1.5 Overview

YMCA Europe do many things well that grow various elements that strengthen YMCA movements yet the overall strategy and leadership is weak. The YERT teams need a framework to judge need and to measure progress and this programme needs to market and recruit more effectively. The field and partner groups have been allowed to fade one by one without strategic leadership creating a poorly performing part of YMCA Europe strategy that again demands leadership and decisions.

The camp development programme emerged as an opportunistic idea that has been very successful in attracting funding and creating concrete results in Armenia and Georgia. It has also created real additional capacity in those movements that give a hope for and a focus on generating income that can sustain and maintain the YMCA organisation in places where such opportunities are rare.

The Armenian YMCA is investing in growing young leaders using the camps as a key resource for a programme that is very successful and which is a genuine investment in the future of that movement. The two Armenian camps provide a real resource and potential for growth and income generation for two local associations.

As such the camp development programme is an excellent use of YMCA Europe time and resource and is clearly contributing to institutional viability, to mission clarity and to sustainability. It should feature clearly in YMCA Europe strategy for the period beyond 2016 and should be a model of development that may be applicable elsewhere.

In examining the process and the role of YMCA Europe in this programme there are clear lessons to be learned about better managing and monitoring the investment. The roles and relationships between regional, national and local YMCAs need to be clearly agreed prior to the project and YMCA Europe need to find an effective mechanism to monitor things moving forward.

This is entirely possible particularly as in this example national staff were employed on the project and therefore would be accepting the overall plan for working together with others. Time spent by YMCA Europe at this early stage will always be of great value as the programme develops.

The YMCA Europe National Assembly 2015 was held in Tallin, Estonia and focused on movement strengthening.

*“Sessions included an evaluation of the current situation in the field of movement strengthening and proposals for future steps which would contribute to consolidate working platforms and field work.”*

Over recent decades there has been an emphasis within YMCA Europe on investing in YMCA development across eastern Europe. There seems to be a current direction of travel, certainly a mood across the organisation to adjust this imbalance to consider western European YMCA needs. It is clear that movement strengthening is still a major demand from eastern Europe YMCAs not least in Armenia and Georgia. It is also clear that the current strategy for movement strengthening could be much more cohesive and strategic and is not serving emerging movements as well as it might. Should YMCA Europe strategy shift to serve western needs it would seem important to revisit investment in weaker eastern Europe movements particularly as the field and partner groups diminish. Purely in terms of priority of needs the focus would surely remain firmly fixed on eastern Europe?

At the very least YMCA Europe should ensure a strong movement development strategy in Eastern Europe before moving its focus elsewhere. Otherwise it will risk losing progress made in recent decades as it withdraws support to national movements disregarding the fact that several of these movements are at a critical stage of development that needs ongoing support. This is prime territory for YMCA Europe to include other YMCA movements in drawing up a staged development framework that would also give direction to a newly inspired and more robust YERT programme.

This framework should demonstrate the journey from a new movement to a strong sustainable movement. YMCA Europe should invest in a participative process with national YMCA movements to draw up such a framework that retains the recognition that every situation will be different and will move at a different pace but that certain elements of developing a strong YMCA movement will apply at certain stages in each place. It needs to avoid being a 'tick box' assessment and must include key aspects of success such as personal relationships (national /local) and process. Perhaps this framework could suggest the appropriate stage of development to be reached before emerging movements gain their independence?

YMCA Europe stated their two primary measures of movement strengthening as:

- a) That the national movement can meet its financial obligations to partners and to YMCA Europe
- b) That the national movement has strong internal democratic processes, election of trustees, good governance, clear role division between staff and Board etc

YMCA Europe should take care to avoid the trap of recognising quantitative data over qualitative; for example ticking the box because they have 12 skilled Board members on paper without exploring whether these members effectively use their skills. In this sense the framework should be outcome or application focused rather than simply registering statistics.

## 7.2 Question Two

### **“Assess the impact of the three centres on the respective YMCA movements”**

In the above section the role of YMCA Europe in developing the camp programme was examined. In this section the focus moves to examine the role of the national YMCA and the impact on their respective movements. This exercise will pick up on some of the earlier discussion which will not be duplicated here and as such requires the reader to follow the developing course of the argument.

#### 7.2.1 Measuring Impact on the YMCA Movement

First thoughts turn here to the stability and capacity of the two YMCA movements prior to the Roots for Reconciliation investment in order to assess the change or improvement now achieved with the new facilities in place.

Throughout the planning process amongst partners for the resource centre element of the Roots for Reconciliation programme there was a consistent goal expressed to achieve sustainable development. This sustainability was particularly defined as the long term viability and independence of the YMCA movement in Armenia and Georgia rather than simply the sustainability of the resource centres/camps themselves. The two are inextricably linked however as successful resource centres are of little benefit if the national movement fails.

The movements in Armenia and Georgia are both relatively new recognising that the Armenian movement needed to rebirth in the early 90s. As such the thirty years of operation since then represents an ongoing journey to sustainability and should not be expected to produce absolute stability and success. It may be helpful to think about some themes of YMCA development and how these have affected the two national movements in question.

##### a) Developing a National YMCA

In the start-up phase the development of a YMCA movement would anticipate initial enthusiastic growth of autonomous local centres as the new movement catches the founders vision and as initial funding for start-up triggers growth.

As local YMCAs form and shape their structures, governance and programmes the national co-ordination and facilitation role would be consolidating and strengthening its systems and support mechanisms, providing practical guidance to the new work at local level and thinking strategically about next steps for the organisation. Some of the structure would be about creating clear criteria for what it means to be a YMCA and agreeing expectations as to local and national roles and responsibilities. As the movement grows the national office would

need to be establishing support networks for staff and channels to connect with wider partners and funders. It is important to recognise during this period of initial growth that the national office is also tasked with funding its own core costs.

YMCA Europe recognises the importance of establishing such systems and structures stating the following in their current strategy,

*“Our YMCAs can only continue to serve if we have suitable structures to lead, monitor, and operate in line with best practices of Institutional Governance.”*

Where growth moves on without the parallel development of the networks and systems it risks confusion in the future and loses opportunity to maximise the rich potential of the locally autonomous associations working together with the national and regional levels of the YMCA. The additional relationship with the regional body added another stakeholder into the mix that demands real clarity of role and responsibility particularly when engaged on a complex partnership project. The original Programme Proposal submitted by YMCA Europe expressed this as an aspiration as follows,

*“For sure the further operation of the Community Resource Centres are to go under the national and local YMCAs, which as a matter of fact will be the case already within the implementation period of the project, but the EAY coordination will remain an essential tool in supporting the network between those Centres and other initiatives involving parties from different corners of the region.”*

It will become clearer in this section of the report that the national YMCA organisations involved in this development approached the task in very different ways raising questions about the consistency of approach between national YMCA movements that will be a concern for YMCA Europe.

#### b) Funding

In Armenia and Georgia the funding situation for voluntary organisations is such that ongoing internal funding is practically non-existent. Unlike many other countries this represents a serious obstacle to sustainability and even to development. It means that long term stability needs to come from external funding (which in essence is unlikely to be a sustainable source) or from self-generated income either programme or fund-raising.

This is balanced by the opportunity to identify significant need in Armenia and Georgia and to present this to external funders who are keen to finance change, to respond to poverty and to fill gaps in provision. This means that greater funds are available from external sources to countries in need than are available to other more developed countries. This situation provides greater opportunity to start new things in Eastern Europe but with much less opportunity to maintain and sustain activity.

As funding would be accessible from external sources it would be important that the YMCA organisation maximises its potential to fundraise for these countries in terms of sourcing

funds, establishing the most effective channels for fundraising and agreeing roles and tasks between regional, national and local levels. This YMCA structure offers great opportunity to maximise income generation but also creates the risk of confusion if roles are not clearly understood. It also presents opportunity to maximise fundraising by emphasising local needs and local governance rather than presenting as a top down rich 'western' organisation.

#### c) Setting clear Goals and Objectives

As funds are raised and projects developed to grow the capacity of the YMCA movements it is important that the organisation is able to measure and judge that growth and the value of the investments by assessing success against initial goals and against the ultimate outcomes.

Because YMCA Armenia and YMCA Georgia handled the development of resource centres/camps in very different ways it provides an interesting task to compare and contrast and to identify what works best. All three centres are at very different development stages so it is important to compare like for like.

In order to assess the impact of the three centres it is necessary to firstly explore the way in which each national movement set up the camps and set in place support where required. Similar to the passing of ownership from YMCA Europe to the national organisations how did each conduct due diligence on their local YMCAs to make sure they were sufficiently skilled and able to manage the responsibility. How did the national movement respond when things did not go according to plan?

### 7.2.2 Management and Oversight of Development

The funding packages for the camps represented several sources of money from different places that together funded the whole project. Money came through YMCA Europe, from international partners and from local sources too.

It was primarily the responsibility of the two national movements to agree and design the way in which the camp development would be directed and channelled in their countries. YMCA Europe worked closely with the two movements to support their thinking and planning and their understanding of the potential impact on sustainability of the camp projects.

The national offices were the hub for the organisation of each camp development as they took on key roles in finances and planning. This of course in partnership with their local YMCAs. Exploring how each movement went about this task helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches.

#### a) Camp Ownership and Development

YMCA Armenia

In Armenia the national movement clearly recognised the potential for the camps that was

presented to them and welcomed the opportunity to get involved. Today their strategic goals are stated as follows:

1. Structural development and good governance nationally and locally
2. Support local YMCAs in their programme development
3. Expanding the movement
4. Contributing to building civil society

YMCA Armenia recognises that the camp development programme contributes to all of their strategic goals

In the early days of the programme the national movement ultimately decided to pass all resource and ownership on to two local YMCAs, YMCA Vanadzor took on the development at Camp Aramyan and YMCA Vardenis took on the development of the new site at Daranak, Lake Sevan. (In Georgia it was agreed that the national movement would retain ownership and management of the development at Camp Orange.)

In the case of Camp Aramyan it was obvious that, as this was an existing campsite, the monies provided to develop the site would not change the ownership but rather would best support that local YMCA's work by growing their capacity and resource. This was an easy decision and has proven to achieve that additional capacity and impact originally planned. Camp Aramyan is a busy site with a design that can accommodate a variety of user groups and with a strong Board at Vanadzor YMCA directing the operation.

However the initial idea, agreed by the American donor, was for Camp Aramyan to be an income generator for both the local YMCA and for the national YMCA. Through leadership changes at YMCA Armenia the camp became managed exclusively by the local YMCA raising funds only for that organisation. This was not the original concept planned by partners including the YMCA of the USA nor by the main donor, the Aramyan family. This was a weakness in the national management and planning of the camp development when a partnership arrangement should have been set in place by YMCA Armenia.

The case of Camp Daranak is different as YMCA Vardenis did not previously own a site although they were a strong local YMCA. In 2010 there was a YMCA leaders retreat held in Armenia focused on discussing how to go about the camp development. There was already an interest in Daranak as the location for the second camp and initially YMCA Armenia expressed their desire to own the building. Other partners including the YMCA of the USA expected the camp to be a site sharing income with the national movement.

The national movement then moved from Yerevan to Spitak which was a much greater distance from Lake Sevan and concluded that if Daranak was the location then it was too far from the office to manage directly and would be better managed exclusively by YMCA Vardenis. This critical decision was driven by contractual requirements that required local builders and involvement of the local YMCA. YMCA Vanadzor agreed with the view that the Daranak site was too far away. YMCA Vardenis was unsure about the reasons for the decision taken by YMCA Armenia.

In spite of these different opinions the national office in Armenia agreed to hand full ownership and responsibility for the camp to YMCA Vardenis including all income and expenditure. This seems to have been a confusing process and is the opposite of the decision taken in Georgia where an even greater distance exists between YMCA Georgia national office in Tbilisi and their site near the Black Sea at Camp Orange that they chose to run themselves.

Thus YMCA Vardenis went ahead to register ownership of the site in their name and the camp came into the ownership of the local association. Once again this would normally be a critical point when, as finance was invested and handed over to the new build managed by YMCA Vardenis, an agreement and contract would clearly demonstrate roles and responsibilities not only for the build but in terms of the operation of the camp.

It was only possible to establish that there is verbal acknowledgement from both national and local YMCAs in Armenia of the aspiration that the camps should serve not just the local YMCA but the national movement. However the way that this should happen and the strategy for running and marketing the camps is very far from being agreed in Armenia. As a result they have camps developed and operating but the strategy for what potential they might achieve is unclear. In terms of the core goal of sustainability for the YMCA movement this is not good.

There was clear opportunity, in the handing over of the responsibility and ownership to the local YMCAs, for the national YMCA in Armenia to agree a contract/memorandum of understanding that would set down the roles and responsibilities, future direction and areas for partnership relating to the operation of the campsites. This would still hand over ownership and authority for the camp but would embed it in a wider understanding of an ongoing role for the national YMCA both in terms of partnership and also in terms of monitoring.

YMCA Armenia today have a 'YMCA camp model' that they have developed and believe in to access a market to make the camps a success. However they admit that there is no agreed camp programme in Armenia and speak of a lack of understanding among the Armenian YMCA family. Camp Aramyan is the only camp with the licence required to be able to charge fees directly to private camp participants, a fact presented as their individual initiative rather than as their next step on a recognised national programme for successful camp operations.

There was also an organisation called YMCA Shelter commissioned to play a key role in the design and construction phase of the camps. As this organisation is no longer in existence it is not possible to follow up on their role but they clearly played an important role in design issues and in the major changes to design. Without further information it is not possible to examine the relationships and oversight of the work of this partner even though it seems likely that the same area of weakness existed here in terms of clear communication and planning between all partners.



As the camp development progressed it hit serious financial challenges as the cost of building materials rose at Camp Aramyan for example by 20%. One of the reasons why YMCA Vanadzor have enjoyed success with their camp is because of the strong skills available to their Board including international business experience, legal skills, communications specialists and voluntary sector leadership. These skills have helped them to navigate difficult challenges not least the increase in costs.

This increase in costs meant that a significant section of the design planned for camp Daranak was unable to be delivered within the available budget. It is unclear what role the national movement played in this and what role YMCA Shelter played in this.

Several stakeholders have expressed surprise that the design and thinking about Camp Daranak did not consider what worked well at Camp Aramyan. Vanadzor YMCA did not receive any visit or request to explore the best layout for the accommodation. Making such connections would have been an obvious recommendation from the national movement.

The decisions taken about ownership in Armenia raise more questions about overall coordination and strategic management of things than about who runs the operation locally. The questions are about the communication and agreements made both during the development of the camps and equally today.

#### YMCA Georgia

In Georgia no such problems arose as the decision by the national movement to run the camp itself meant that there was no confusion or role division as everything was the responsibility of the national organisation.

The Georgia YMCA recognised the potential within the camp programme for increased sustainability and programme development so agreed to take it on. This decision left the national movement with a challenge as to how they could manage this significant new challenge within already limited staff resource. The funding from Roots for Reconciliation into staff salaries cleared a path financially. Their wider planning process is a model of good practice for such development for others.

YMCA Georgia made the following decisions along this journey which were key to their success in the development of the new facility at Camp Orange:

1. They recognised that the camp presented an ideal opportunity to work towards the independence from external funding that they sought and as such should be a key strategic goal. It also provided an opportunity to plan to serve real community needs through the camp development which was their second strategic aim.
2. They recognised in advance that they would need to stop doing some things in order to start on this new piece of work. For example Gela stopped doing international

partnership work in order to create time to work on this development.

3. They considered the skills they would need to build the camp using property and financial skills already around their Board table, their own architect etc.
4. They learned great lessons from Y USA. For example they saw that in the US project development would not start until they had banked at least 80% of the funds required. They applied this discipline to the camp development.
5. They did their homework on income generation and potential markets before they committed. For example they researched the potential tourist market from Russia, Poland and Armenia with planned improved transport links to the campsite that would enhance this. They were aware of the emerging competition from private providers and of the fact that it was still a difficult economic situation in the country.
6. Their budgets and financial planning were very strong, mapping their journey towards sustainability. They thought through issues like cash flow and annual operating and capital budgets. Looking to the future they have clear income targets seeking to achieve \$30,000 income in five years time so that the Georgia YMCA will then have moved to generate most of their income internally which would be a huge goal to reach. They know how many months income they need to book at the camp to reach this target leading to informed goals for the camp programme. They set aside reserves to cover camp costs.

Even when difficulties arose the wisdom and experience of the Georgian YMCA became obvious. At a late stage of the development of Camp Orange the government identified a tax of 18% of build cost due before the camp could legally operate. This was not something evident during the planning process so was not factored into the budgets.

Facing this challenge the Georgian YMCA confirmed the importance to their long term goals of completing the camp project and decided to sell 50% of the property they owned in Tbilisi so that they could clear this hurdle. Again because there were no other partners involved it was much simpler to take decisions as the responsibility for everything was clearly that of the Georgian national YMCA.

It remains too early to make a judgement on sustainability of the Georgian YMCA movement as Camp Orange is just completing in 2015. However the management of the Georgian National YMCA is sufficient to inspire real confidence in the future success of the facility.

In short this picture demonstrates the enthusiasm and willingness to grasp new opportunity evident in both National movements. It is really important that the YMCA remains open to change and new ideas and resists falling into an attitude that they have little to learn or that they are doing everything well.

The research confirms very different approaches by each national movement to this opportunity in the way that each went about the decision about managing the development and about working with other partners. With the passage of time the outcome for Georgia will suggest a more robust operation at Camp Orange with real potential for income generation and genuine ongoing relationship with the local community.

In Camp Aramyan the outcome of ownership was always pre-ordained due to the existing camp operation yet the partnership with the national YMCA could have been better planned and developed. In Daranak the decision to pass ownership on the basis of distance and local engagement seems to ignore the wider potential and solutions that YMCA Georgia faced when in the same position. Having made the decision to hand over to the local YMCA the national office in Armenia certainly failed to set in place agreements about the strategic goals for the camps, to define roles and responsibilities with local partners and to agree a partnership strategy and monitoring arrangements for the future.

The different decisions taken along the separate journeys have resulted in difficult relations and decision-making processes in Daranak in particular while in Georgia and through Vanadzor YMCA no such complications exist. Georgia's sound planning has created a better base for the future operation of the camp as they work towards very clear budget expectations and in the light of well informed research on the potential of the camping market.

The lack of a YMCA Europe steering or oversight group meant that there was no obvious place to share and discuss two very different national strategies. This reduced the ability of YMCA Europe to challenge and explore alternatives which could otherwise have made a big difference to the process.

#### b) Relations between YMCA partners

Overall it must be stated that YMCA relationships are generally very positive and that there exists a genuine family feel to the organisation which is unusual for such a large global operation. This report however focuses in on relationships within the camp programme and in particular on where difficulties lay so that these can be addressed and improved.

The 2009 report on the Roots for Reconciliation programme recognised the need for capacity and training within the national movements and with local YMCA relationships in order for them to be able to play the role required of them in this development.

*“One of the project's major strengths – structuring the project so that it is implemented by the national YMCA movements - has also been the source of significant challenges. For example, it has been necessary to invest significant resources on building the capacity of the national YMCA movements so that they can play their part in the implementation of the project. This has placed considerable responsibilities on the Regional Project Coordinator.*

*A further challenge brought about by the project design is dealing with the complex relationships between the national YMCA secretariat and the local YMCAs. The project works through the national YMCA secretariats but, of course, relies on the support and co-operation of the local YMCAs. When relationships between national and local YMCAs are*

*positive and constructive, the project benefits from that. However, when relationships between national and local YMCAs are problematic (as has been the case on a number of instances) the RfR project leadership can be placed in a difficult position. This is particularly relevant for the National Coordinators of the project who hold official positions in the national YMCA secretariats. That the difficulties have been overcome says much about the shared commitment to the project's long-term success and the willingness to find agreed solutions."*

RfR Report 2009

It is clear today that the difficulties had not been overcome and that the mechanisms had not been set in place that could manage those relationships (in relation to this project) where questions and differences arose.

Lack of clarity about these things has meant that the relationship between YMCA Vardenis and YMCA Armenia for example has suffered rendering the potential for the camp to be a success as a partnership programme that much harder to achieve.

Much of the challenge identified in the camp development process could be easily resolved if there were clear roles and responsibilities, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and partnership working protocols in place between the partners. Though there have been multiple partners involved including several external partners it is the internal YMCA structures that most require attention. This means the relationships between YMCA Europe, the National YMCA and the local YMCAs. In brief...

#### Clear Roles and Responsibilities

When a new project or partnership is planned a Memorandum of Understanding should be produced involving all stakeholders, declaring the common goal and direction of travel and noting the role of each partner in this, the ways in which partners will come together, monitoring and evaluation processes, how difficulties will be handled, levels of decision making that can be taken unilaterally and when they need to be taken together. Partners would come together to review progress from time to time.

Such an agreement would have been helpful between YMCA Europe and the national YMCAs as the development was handed to them retaining a role for YMCA Europe of monitoring the spend of monies that they had raised for the programme. This raises a further question beyond the remit of this report as to how clearly the roles and relationships are explained and defined between YMCA Europe and each national movement even before any new project emerges? There seems to be a different view taken within YMCA Armenia about how they go about supporting and working together with their local YMCAs. This represents a training issue for the national movement to open the door to effective partnership working in the future.

Within this understanding it would also be wise to appoint a lead partner for any one development. In the case of the camp development that would most obviously be the national YMCA who would chair the oversight group, conduct the monitoring and evaluation and manage the journey through any problems or difficulties. This role retains the national YMCA in the development rather than giving away all authority and it enables them to

support the local YMCAs in their respective development programmes yet to coordinate things together when that makes sense.

Sometimes this central oversight can be provided through a steering or oversight group. This would be best led by the national YMCA and could include external members with expertise in the area of development who could bring added value to the monitoring process. Whatever model is chosen it is clearly best for the national YMCA to retain a clearly defined role in the project in partnership with their local YMCAs.

In concluding this section on Clear Roles and Responsibilities it may be helpful to note one additional area where a helpful role can be unhelpfully confusing. YMCA Armenia have been using a US consultant for several years now. However clear their role is within the Armenian national movement it is unclear to other partners just where the consultant's role starts and stops, where they are representing YMCA Armenia and where they are representing their company.

This partnership is no doubt very helpful to YMCA Armenia but would be even more helpful if other partners within the YMCA movement could better understand the role and relationship where it moves beyond the walls of the national office. This is a further example of the need for clear role delineation and management of partnership working within YMCA Armenia.

#### Monitoring and Evaluation

When a new programme is launched YMCA needs to ensure that there are clear goals and measureable outcomes in place at the outset. They need to plan to carry out effective monitoring of progress towards those outcomes and to evaluate the work when completed.

This needs to date back to the earliest stages of planning and should also challenge YMCA Europe about the budget and plan for evaluation of the camps that was in their minds at the beginning.

Partners need to see monitoring as helpful and not to see it as inspection or interference. This requires a culture of understanding of evaluation that sees it as something to welcome, that can create improvement and change for the good. It needs to avoid any fear of being caught out that would deny honesty in the process but an attitude that evaluation becomes a part of everyday life as we strive to be the best YMCA we can be.

Having such a process in place alongside the partner groups outlined above would enable YMCA Europe for example to set these things up retaining the lead partner role on oversight of the camp development. This strategic group would bring all partners together to assess progress, creating a safe space where difficult questions could be addressed and where each partner could hear about success from others. For example YMCA Europe could call the partners together triggered by the planned strategy for the use of Phase II EPER-HEKS money.

Alternatively the national YMCA could establish the group with YMCA Armenia bringing Vanadzor and Vardenis YMCAs together to assess progress creating the space for them to

learn from each other and to coordinate an overall Armenian YMCA camp strategy. As YMCA Georgia is the sole agent for Camp Orange there is no partnership therefore no need for this co-ordination. It would be important however for them to ensure that they have a sound internal process of creating and assessing outcomes and targets as the work progresses.

#### b) Marketing the camps

Strategy for camps at YMCA Europe level includes a passion for national marketing campaigns to recruit camp participants who would pay fees to help sustain the organisation.

Both national movements state their belief in the same strategy for YMCA camps which includes investing in the sites mentioned but more importantly seeking to make camping a primary programme for the national movement maximising the income generated from private camp participants using national marketing materials. This is presented as a fund raising strategy that benefits both national and local partners.

When the camps were first set up in Armenia the then National Secretary drew up a business plan making the case for generating an income of some \$60,000 a year but he was not able to convince the camps to take it on.

There seem to have been conflicting views as to how to go about running the Armenian camps to achieve that sustainable income generation so desired. The funder EPER-HEKS clearly had a view about what they wanted to see at camp Daranak which was not shared by the national movement who pressed forward with the pipeline project; The national office in Armenia had a view of camp strategy that was not taken up or shared by the two local YMCAs; The two national movements have different views on how to set up and operate the camps; The two Armenian local YMCAs produced very different designs for their accommodation without consulting each other on what would work best from a marketing perspective.

Having different views on strategy and development is normal and even healthy. Where it becomes a problem is when it fails to communicate and consider other opinions and forges its own way regardless or ignorant of other options. On the topic of marketing the camps the national movements had a view, to embark on private camp places to generate a national brand that would earn income for both national and local YMCAs. However this view was not translated into an agreed strategy in Armenia due to the aforementioned gap in national agreements or joint plans. As a result today there is talk of misunderstandings about camp strategy and in the case of Daranak a lack of shared responsibility or initiative on behalf of the national movement. There is a sense within YMCA Armenia today that Camp Daranak was, 'more of a YMCA Europe project'. This is not helpful to the national YMCA ownership of this agenda.

This is represented in a perception from within the national movement in Armenia that the Daranak site can not become self sufficient due to the poor economic environment nor is it marketable due to the poor transport links and design of the accommodation.

These statements present less of an informed conclusion on effective marketing of the Daranak site and more of an example of the lack of communication and relationship that this report has highlighted. It also presents an unhelpful negative view that denies the responsibility to provide effective leadership in the situation. In terms of the solution of reforming and reshaping an effective partnership the national YMCA only offered a return to national ownership as an option. Again this highlights the need for YMCA Armenia to rethink the potential of partnership working with their local YMCAs.

To their credit YMCA Armenia has worked to help Vardenis YMCA to improve things at Daranak. They offered meetings to develop camp strategy together which have met with some progress, to help to develop marketing plans and provided training for business managers in local YMCA staff teams and have organised YMCA camps at the Daranak site to provide income.

However it seems that without the partnership structures in place to help communication the relationship between YMCA Armenia and YMCA Vardenis has today fallen into some difficulty. The solutions offered by YMCA Armenia stop short of full partnership and treat the camp as a YMCA Vardenis programme that is their responsibility to manage and turn around rather than as a shared responsibility that YMCA Armenia is committed to resolve with them. They have reached an impasse where each party is backing away from working together and this situation needs to be addressed promptly in order to restore relationship and in order to achieve success for camp Daranak.

The need for better working together in Armenia is underlined as Camp Aramyan today confess that they still need to produce a strong marketing plan for the site. The opportunity for the Armenian movement to come together to do things better is both obvious and critical. There is no regular meeting of CEOs from each local YMCA in Armenia which is an essential element of national YMCA co-ordination and leadership.

In contrast the investment of time in planning and understanding the challenge of marketing the camp in Georgia has proven to produce a very different scenario today. This may of course also reflect the different skills set available to YMCA Georgia. It has created a more ambitious yet well informed strategy for marketing which is covered in detail under Question Three. Once again the wisdom of YMCA Georgia retaining control of the camp makes everything so much easier.

In particular it is important to point out that YMCA Georgia is able to demonstrate a much more detailed picture of financial management than any of the other two YMCAs running camps. Their preparation includes detailed budgets, targets for income by certain dates, cash flow forecasts, reserves and contingency plans and actual programme goals that can achieve the financial targets. This will of course change and adjust as some things work and

other do not but in terms of planning and understanding the marketing of camp Orange this is an impressive approach that could offer much learning to their Armenian colleagues.

### 7.2.3 Overview

So the impact on the two national movements is not yet clear. The camps at Ureki and Daranak are still firmly in development mode and their business and marketing plans have yet to be tested. Camp Aramyan is working well with slow steady progress but would benefit from support for marketing plans and from opportunity to work more closely with the national YMCA.

The opportunity to engage in the camp development programme, though enthusiastically grasped by both movements, has not delivered the level of sustainability and early impact one would have expected at this point down the line. Of course development was slower than anticipated and costs were higher meaning some work was more limited than it might have been.

However it is very clear that had YMCA Europe conducted better due diligence and set in place better monitoring and partnership arrangements with the national movements then the development plan would have progressed much more smoothly avoiding some of the difficulties that have burdened their progress.

National movements will always be enthusiastic about development opportunities but it is important to look beyond this enthusiasm to clarify what skills, capacity, knowledge and experience they have, where they are weak and how you are going to monitor and support them in this.

When handing over resources and responsibility to another party due diligence is the means by which you determine the capacity and ability and attitude of the other party to the investment. It highlights gaps and needs where the organisation may need support or training in order to deliver the responsibility well and it can identify those relationships that need closer monitoring and partnership working.

Due diligence would always include assessment of financial management, governance processes, basic legal status, leadership and strategic skills and programme implementation plans. It would also establish and agree an appropriate monitoring arrangement with clear agreed protocols for when things go wrong and with authority retained by the commissioner for withdrawal of funds and permissions in circumstances where the delivery is significantly off plan.

Today, although the camps need significant support to achieve success, it seems that YMCA Armenia has moved away from a camp development strategy to focus on developing young leaders. It seems to have done this wholesale almost deciding that the camp development is finished. This is a very unwise strategy and abandons the local YMCAs to deal with the camps on their own.



Camp Aramyan seems to be working well and the decision to transfer ownership to the YMCA at Vanadzor was the only one available and the correct thing to do. The impact on the national movement of Camp Aramyan is a positive impact as they are able to run national camps and increased leadership training but is a smaller impact than anticipated and one which would have benefited from better joint working. Vanadzor YMCA confirmed that they would really appreciate working together with the wider YMCA family in Armenia as *“it would have avoided programme planning and communication difficulties”*. Given time Camp Aramyan will be a real success story largely due to the hard work of Vanadzor YMCA.

The disappointing thing here is the lack of effective partnership working and support systems from the national office that have and continue to limit impact to the initiative of the local YMCA. This recognising the programme efforts and training that YMCA Armenia provides to both camps but which falls short of direct commitment to make the camp a real success. Again this dates back to the failure at the beginning to clarify roles and responsibilities and partnership arrangements.

Camp Daranak presents the strongest example of difficulties along the development journey that now create drag on the successful impact of the new centre. YMCA Vardenis struggles to achieve income to meet costs at the centre and to come up with an effective business/ marketing plan as the report demonstrates in the following section. The poor working relationships with YMCA Armenia continue to deteriorate to the point of demanding intervention from YMCA Europe. Again much of this could have been solved through better planning and partnership working. The impact on the national movement through Camp Daranak is currently in deficit and there is much hard work to be done to achieve the impact on the national movement originally planned.

In Georgia the impact on the national movement has been one initially of change as the decision to keep the management and ownership in house required significant planning and change to programme provision, use of staffing resources and finances. Perhaps the biggest impact here was the secondment of the national CEO Gela to manage the camp development passing much of the normal management role at the national office to Rezi, his deputy.

This was a huge decision for YMCA Georgia which included Gela's withdrawal from a very significant international role in order to concentrate on the campsite. However during major development projects it is often the case that work previously carried out is stopped and priorities are reviewed and re-ordered and as such this looks to have been sound management.

Certainly the plan of YMCA Georgia is very focused on the goal of movement sustainability including translation of this goal into money terms. This goes beyond the Armenian perspective which is largely about local camp sustainability and reflects the impact of the different decisions to manage camps locally or nationally. So we connect reduced impact on the national movement's sustainability to vague and unclear outcomes at the start of the Armenian programme. If it had been made clear that the outcome was the sustainability of

the wider national movement then the Daranak site would have been retained as a national centre working in partnership with the local YMCA.

In Georgia the potential impact looks good and the sound planning and marketing should translate into a very successful centre. The one important aspect that is still to be addressed in Georgia is the benefit to local YMCAs. As Camp Orange is run and managed by the national movement, if there is a risk or a challenge it would be around the impact on the local YMCAs. This should be a clear outcome for YMCA Georgia as they move forward so that they can ensure this benefit is delivered to local YMCAs as the national centre grows and develops.

### 7.3 Question Three

#### ***“Consider the current and potential sustainability of the three centres”***

The third and final question we will explore in this Discussion section is less about the wider YMCA organisation and management of the camp development and more about the actual operation and sustainability of the resource centres/camps themselves. It is clear that the three camps are all at different stages of development with the long established Camp Aramyan further forward than Daranak and with Camp Orange only at the start of its journey. This means that it is too early to make any definitive conclusions about sustainability and that the conversation can only present the current stage and future potential for each site.

This section will compare and contrast the development of the three camps following an initial outline of the current situation in each location.

#### 7.3.1 Camp Aramyan

As an original campsite operating since 1999 the investment in Camp Aramyan was about refurbishment and renovation of the buildings. It was largely supported by money from the Aramyan family in the US and through financial support from an international partner in Oslo.

Prior to the development the camp was very active but the buildings were in a poor state of repair. The heating system was struggling to cope and the capacity to accommodate groups was very limited. The development work has clearly transformed this camp to be able to operate several months of the year with the capacity and facilities to deliver quality camp experiences. This extension of the capacity and ability to operate on a greater scale are significant advances in terms of income generation and ultimate sustainability.

It is the initiative of YMCA Europe in developing the Roots for Reconciliation programme and enabling the camp development concept in partnership with the YMCA of the USA that helped Vanadzor YMCA to move from a struggling operation to a foundation for growth.

The local YMCA itself proudly claims to be sustainable with income from the camp helping it

to move out of debt and having fully caught up with payment of taxes and salaries. Income for YMCA Vanadzor is now twice what it was prior to the development. The camp development provided a much stronger strategic growth strategy for Vanadzor YMCA as the previous plan included renting out the local YMCA centre to cover costs which would have removed a source of income generation and operation in the process. The independence from external donors that YMCA Vanadzor now enjoys is exactly the outcome sought by the Roots for Reconciliation camp programme

The buildings at the local YMCA are in a similar poor state rendering income generation from this venue difficult to achieve. The camp therefore presents a unique opportunity for the sustainability of the whole local YMCA with a desire to ultimately fund the renovation of the Vanadzor YMCA centre using income generated through the camp.

*“In this aspiration lies evidence of real success in creating the circumstances for building the long term sustainability of the YMCA.”*

Before the development of Camp Aramyan the site was only opened for 4 weeks each year whereas today it is operating for a full three months during the summer season and another two months of the year beyond that. Previously staffed fully by volunteers the camp now employs kitchen and leadership staff providing a quality service to users.

YMCA Vanadzor has an aspiration to continue to grow the camp operation so that they are operational all year round. This aspiration itself is really important. When things are a struggle, buildings are deteriorating and monies are owed the management of a camp becomes a burden and risk becomes a worry. The investment in Camp Aramyan has transformed the attitude of the YMCA Board and staff to see the potential and to move beyond anxiety to pursue success through this new facility. This change in attitude is critical in order to trigger entrepreneurial enthusiasm that can effectively market and grow the camp.

It has created a drive to deliver international and local YMCA camp programmes with a passion for serving the Armenian international diaspora. YMCA Vanadzor is also the only camp licensed to charge private individuals for camp fees, a demonstration of their commitment to increase income. They charge reduced fees to YMCA Armenia and local YMCAs retaining a shared goal of building the wider YMCA movement.

Camp Aramyan is already benefiting from some sound marketing work using social media which successfully recruited camp leaders this past year. This is a good example of the connection to serve local communities at Camp Aramyan as many young people from the local villages responded through facebook to become YMCA volunteer leaders attending young leader training at the YMCA. Today the YMCA receives daily calls about volunteering and engaging with programmes demonstrating the success of this publicity drive.

The young leaders programme initiative, which is a partnership with the national YMCA, is a very successful programme investing in growing new young leaders for the YMCA organisation and producing a leadership team at Camp Aramyan who plan and deliver programmes in consultation with staff.

Camp Aramyan also presents a very good example of integration between the local YMCA and the campsite and can offer learning on this front to the other two camps at Daranak and Ureki.

The development of Camp Aramyan has been a real success story and the investment has already changed the operation to increase activity and income and more significantly to trigger an aspirational commitment to grow the camp programme to be a truly successful year round operation. It goes beyond this to create the possibility of generating sufficient income to fund the renovation and future success of the local YMCA itself. In this aspiration lies evidence of real success in creating the circumstances for building the long term sustainability of the YMCA.

The camp still has room to grow and challenges to face including:

- a) The need for a YMCA Vanadzor strategic plan that includes camp growth and which plans income to fund the local YMCA improvement in the medium term
- b) The need for a marketing plan to grow programme income
- c) Concerns about the economic situation in Armenia that may limit potential for growth
- d) The need to work better together with National YMCA to develop the camp

### 7.3.2 Camp Daranak

The development of Camp Daranak has been difficult with soaring costs limiting the plans, difficulty in the relationship with National YMCA, withdrawal of funders and difficult access to the site. These elements, including the fact that this was a new build, place Camp Daranak at a very different stage to that of Camp Aramyan. The view of YMCA Vanadzor was that the Lake Sevan camp is now in the position that they were in before their development plan even started in 2008. There remains a need for YMCA Vardenis to source funding to install a good heating system at the camp and to build outdoor programme facilities for participating groups.

The choice of site brings with it the serious limitation of very poor access roads that require a real commitment to navigate. The primary client of the camp, World Vision stated that,

*“The roads are a real problem but we still come!”*

However Camp Daranak has completed a build on a beautiful site with great potential for success and with access to some very deprived refugee communities. Although it only operates consistently during the summer months this brings in much of the money needed to cover costs and World Vision have proven to be a very loyal and lucrative client. This year World Vision’s Area Development Project plans to run five camps of 3-4 days each targeting almost 200 local refugee children.

The interface with the local community seems to be one of provider/client. The local refugee families do not have the capacity to finance costs at Daranak so programme provision is

funded through World Vision. It would be important for YMCA Vardenis to see the refugee communities as their community rather than as a client and to seek ways to invest in them. It would be very helpful for YMCA Vardenis to visit Camp Orange to see the relationship and strategy of YMCA Georgia in relation to the local community.

It is disappointing that some of the problems holding success back at Camp Daranak are related to incomplete design. World Vision, the primary client for the camp, expressed their disappointment that the accommodation limits the numbers that they would like to bring to camp. YMCA Vardenis themselves agree that they would prefer to have 100 bedspaces and that, *"...we missed this during the design phase"*. The conversation with YMCA Vanadzor at design stage would have resolved this problem yet this was never organised.

The lack of a good heating system will rule out capacity during colder months of the year and the lack of programme facilities outside again significantly limits the use of the camp. Completion of the camp to a reasonable degree (which would include heating and outdoor facilities) would expect funding partners to stay involved until that point rather than leaving the local YMCA to face this challenge on their own. Any marketing or strategic plan would need to prioritise these elements to complete a centre that can be effectively marketed. YMCA Vardenis is aware of this although they do not currently have a business/strategic plan in place.

The lack of effective partnership with YMCA Armenia means that Camp Daranak will only be as good as YMCA Vardenis makes it rather than having the potential to be as good as all YMCA partners could make it. The absence of a business/strategic plan, at a critical time when the camp sorely needs a clear way forward, is again a major need that requires external support as YMCA Vardenis do not feel that they have those skills in house as a number of skilled volunteers have moved away from the area in the recent past.

YMCA Vardenis is committed to the goal of Camp Daranak contributing not only to their own local sustainability but to the capacity of the wider YMCA. Like Camp Aramyan they will offer reduced prices to YMCA partners. However at the same time there are real difficulties in the communication and relationship between YMCA Armenia and YMCA Vardenis which render this partnership to be unproductive at this point in time. This problem should represent one of the primary targets for YMCA Europe intervention to facilitate a good working relationship here. YMCA Armenia are running a five day camp at Daranak this August called 'Building Leaders for Armenia' yet this seems to be more under the contract to access the camp rather than as part of a healthy ongoing relationship.

There also exists the risk of over reliance on one client as World Vision produce such a high percentage of camp income. The Education Officer from World Vision confirmed that the camp was not the first choice of her organisation as another centre in Dilijan (some two hours drive further north) was their preferred site. Clearly the needs of local children draw them to use Daranak but this should not be taken for granted in the future. This question calls for the business/strategic plan to market the centre to other clients to spread the risk. It also suggests the need to be aware of the needs of the primary client; for instance World

Vision would like to grow environmental programming and would be keen to have internet access on site.

As it stands the camp is operating without full facilities which is not easy and it is short of the target to operate for ninety days to generate sufficient income to cover all costs. The heating and outdoor facilities create an additional hurdle to cross before they can fully sell and market the camp to achieve this goal. Beyond this problem the potential for success also relies on external factors outside of the control of the local YMCA like the re-development of the roads system.

It is a concern that a complex trading environment is not being addressed by an active business plan. The approach of YMCA Vardenis is to try to get external support for this task from organisations such as the Armenian Peace Corps. It might be much more efficient to access such skills from within the international YMCA movement which could not only easily provide this skill but could remain available beyond the task to support the work. Once again a question arises as to why YMCA Armenia does not facilitate this connection for such a critical task. For reasons to descend into accusations of 'who did what' is a sad failure of leadership.

YMCA Armenia states their willingness to engage yet does not see the critical nature of the problem requiring urgent action. They tend to see the camp not as a shared asset but as YMCA Vardenis' property and as such are more concerned with their young leaders programme. Meetings with local CEOs have reduced to become a rare thing and this contributes to lack of relationship between national and local YMCA. When meetings do take place it equally requires the CEO of Vardenis YMCA to proactively attend these gatherings to heal relationships in the interest of the camp at Daranak.

This leaves YMCA Vardenis thinking that they should perhaps change the focus of the centre to be a retreat centre yet without the knowledge and expertise to understand best use and purpose. This reflects back upon the earlier decision of YMCA Vardenis to operate as a camp rather than as a resource centre as originally planned. There is a lack of guidance and direction here which needs additional support as it is not only about effective management but about knowledge of camping programmes.

This lack of clarity will again be damaging to the camp development process without robust support and intervention from other partners in the YMCA family. Support with complex budget calculations and planning and with marketing plans would also be helpful.

One parallel benefit emerging from the camp development has been the provision of monies from World Vision to renovate the YMCA centre in Vardenis which has enabled them to strengthen their work and capacity there. At the campsite however things are far from being sustainable and many flaws have been identified in the development process. There is a critical need for YMCA Europe to intervene to heal relationships between YMCA Armenia and YMCA Vardenis and to support improved communication and strategy both at national level and at YMCA Vardenis level.

### 7.3.3 Camp Orange

Camp Orange is the least developed of the three campsites having only recently completed the major capital works and still working on the building. It is different also in the sense that it was retained by YMCA Georgia rather than being transferred into the ownership of a local YMCA as in Armenia. This partly following past practice as all YMCA property in Georgia is held by the national movement. This section will include some comparison with Camp Daranak that can highlight strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches taken.

The planning process undertaken by YMCA Georgia was very detailed and an example of good management. The organisation has been wise in planning the spend and in managing the change of a major new commitment. It has been patient to delay starting any stage of the development until everything is in place. This approach is also evident in their wider work as they adopt a cautious approach to developing new YMCAs waiting until local ownership and capacity is in place before moving forwards.

As a result the camp provides great potential for income generation particularly with the sound budget and financial planning in place. The marketing strategy is a good example of how Camp Orange is more advanced in its management processes than the two Armenian camps even though they are in a later stage of development.

For example their research identified:

- a) ...the potential tourist market visiting the Black Sea that would respond to family camps and the emerging road network that would enhance this.
- b) ...the potential to develop plans for civil society and agriculture education programmes, to approach the Ministry of Agriculture to access finance to provide training.
- c) ...the potential in schools
- d) ...the need to train staff and volunteers and the opportunity to provide this through US partners
- e) ...the need to work out in advance a national marketing strategy that included web-based materials, publicity, radio and distribution of materials in schools and universities
- f) ...the opportunity to create a fund for the use of local YMCAs in accessing the camps
- g) ...the niche in the market that YMCA could claim in the delivery of civic education and training.
- h) ...local competition in the form of a church camp, scout camps and previous government political camps were each serving different sectors of the market or too far to provide a threat.
- i) ...the opportunity to partner with CENN to provide environmental camps

YMCA Georgia is very aware of the camp competition in the area and how YMCA can market itself to claim a niche market.

Earlier in this report the issue of staff resource was explored recognising that the time spent on the camp project by the National General Secretary has been very significant to the point of creating a need for additional resource back in Tbilisi. Gela's time at the camp has provided a high value project management role with a decision maker in place who can move things forward and who can be trusted to spend money within budgets. In parallel YMCA Europe support to Rezi's post back in Tbilisi has been invaluable particularly in investing in the future leadership of the Georgian movement. The decision to drop international travel and partnerships in place of Gela's time at the camp was another good example of sound planning.

The purchase and development of Camp Orange has not all gone smoothly either with the conflict with Russia closing down any progress in 2008. There is an interesting comparison to the situation at Camp Daranak where less money meant change in design that has created limitations. In Georgia original plans to buy a building for \$40,000 were unsuccessful. At this point the plan was reviewed and changed dramatically demanding a much larger budget that was money the YMCA did not have. The important difference to the Daranak situation was a very clear vision and strategy for the new design that drove the commitment to achieve it. In Daranak there was no strategic plan for a successful centre, it was more of an adjustment to fit within budget regardless of the consequences of that decision. So in Georgia the YMCA sought partners in the USA, sold their vision to them and agreed a major additional investment of grant aid over a four year period.

The surprise bill that required an additional 18% government tax before the camp could go operational was another example of barriers along the journey for YMCA Georgia. Their decision to sell property in Tbilisi to cover this cost demonstrated again a very clear vision and set of priorities. Along with the uncertain economic situation these difficulties represent the same challenge to camp development facing the Armenian camps yet the stronger vision, management and planning from YMCA Georgia navigate these hurdles so much better.

A group of Ukrainian businessmen offered to take over the camp for the summer in exchange for significant income. The fact that YMCA will continue to run their own camp programme through the summer again shows a wisdom and clarity of vision for what they wish to achieve here.

Another aspect of the development that they have done very well is the commitment to and planning for service to deprived communities. The site was selected to be near to such communities and Gela has almost adopted the closest one providing employment at the camp to local people (80% of locals can only find seasonal employment), advice on fighting against floods, providing training in hospitality services reflecting the local opportunities. The strategy admirably also includes a commitment to support deprived communities through a community development approach to better access support and help from government departments.

This remains firmly in the strategic control of YMCA Georgia allowing them to gain additional income through grants to serve these communities. This compares to the position at Daranak



where World Vision control the grants and pay YMCA for services which is a much weaker position for the long term.

As it starts to generate programme at the camp YMCA Georgia has planned that in five years time it will be able to bring in the majority of its income (some \$30,000) from its own resources. This would represent a major success on the road to sustainability lifting the YMCA out of reliance upon external funders. The calculations to achieve this appear to be entirely feasible with such income possible from only five months trading leaving a further seven months of the camp available for additional income generation.

The major question to be posed to YMCA Georgia must be the connection to and engagement of local YMCAs in the camp development as they have chosen to retain ownership centrally. Does this decision mean less benefit to local YMCAs and to the wider Georgian movement?

Certainly three of the four local YMCAs in Georgia have already expressed interest in running camps at the centre which will bring income for them and grow their capacity. Half of the young leaders interviewed in Tbilisi came from local YMCAs with a real passion to take learning from YMCA camps back to benefit their local YMCA programme.

Yet the primary beneficiary of income generation through the camp is likely to be the national movement as they embark on a strong strategy of selling services to external partners. This summer for instance the facility will welcome a Peace Corps camp, there are big plans for local schools and for fee-paying children and YMCA volunteer training is paid from the USA.

YMCA Georgia is also committed to raising the profile of the YMCA for camping activity which will benefit the local YMCAs, to accommodate local YMCA meetings, training and retreats and to establish a local YMCA fund from the profits. In fact they plan to launch a second camp in Eastern Georgia in the future.

The nature of the national ownership of Camp Orange suggests that it should be monitored in future years in terms of the relationship with and added value to the local YMCAs if it is to achieve that goal of building the capacity of the whole movement. Controlling this investment through income made by the national organisation is no bad thing as long as the money can demonstrate real benefit beyond the national office.

Relationships across the Georgian movement seem good so there is no reason to think that will not happen. Partnership working with YMCA Europe is also good reflected in the joint planning for Profest 2015. This all adds up to a very positive picture for Camp Orange with strong planning and financial management in particular that augurs well for the future sustainability of the facility. It will be helpful to see the long term strategy for movement sustainability, possibly including that second campsite, so that any leadership succession can commit to the same direction of travel.

#### 7.3.4 Overview

The three camps are clearly very different and this report has already explored in some detail the reasons why some have struggled while others have thrived. Overall YMCA Europe can be very pleased with the investment in camp facilities in both Camps Aramyan and Orange where additional capacity, income generation and potential sustainability are either already being built or are likely to be built.

Camp Daranak, though holding much potential, is in urgent need of additional support and at best may achieve slow progress if left to survive alone. It demonstrates risk in several areas all of which are open to change yet some of which require intervention from outside the national movement.

The idea of investing in good camp facilities in Eastern Europe is a sound one and one that may well be applicable to other countries too. It can, if well managed, produce new and sustainable income, support local YMCAs to become self sufficient and to inspire them to greater things. It can provide a national movement with a means to generate income and programme capacity that can grow local YMCAs and raise the profile of the YMCA movement.

The secret is the management of the resource and effective partnership working. The evaluation of Phase I of the Roots for Reconciliation programme stated...

*“For sure the further operation of the Community Resource Centres are to go under the national and local YMCAs, which as a matter of fact will be the case already within the implementation period of the project, but the EAY coordination will remain an essential tool in supporting the network between those Centres and other initiatives involving parties from different corners of the region.”*

This ideal partnership model bringing together the best of regional, national and local YMCA to make the camps a huge success has been an opportunity missed. Where management skills are not strong and there is a lack of clear vision for the camp the opportunity for success and sustainability fades. Where YMCA does not work together to achieve success then the camp loses much of the capacity that would otherwise drive it forward.

## 8. Conclusions

The investment in the camps is a strategy that will be successful in achieving sustainability of the YMCA movements involved and which may well be successful in other regions eg the Balkans. Early plans underestimated the challenges facing the camps and poor management has caused a loss of lost momentum as well. Early evaluations predicted success that was not yet established or sustainable,

*“At this point we can state that all the three sub-projects were successfully set-up, consequently producing the expected and agreed results”*

*“Thanks to the project the YMCA Movements in the region have also grown towards self-sustainability and good-governance.”*

YMCA Europe, RfR Final Report on Phase I

Today all three camps retain the potential to be a success yet progress has been slow and it remains too early to judge sustainability in Camps Daranak and Orange. Camp Aramyan can already demonstrate significant increase in income and stability for Vanadzor YMCA. The timeframe planned to reach sustainable operation in a YMCA camp should reflect the extended timeframes now evident in Armenia and Georgia.

This report has explored in detail elements of the development work that worked well and those that did not work so well. The report draws conclusions from this discussion as follows:

### 8.1 Sustainability

The development of resource centres/camps fits strongly within the YMCA brand and will prove to be an effective means of sustaining YMCA work in Armenia and Georgia. Elements of sustainability are already evident for Vanadzor YMCA with income doubling at the campsite and funding the YMCA. The potential is very strong for the same to be achieved at Camps Daranak and Orange. YMCA Georgia demonstrates particularly strong planning and

management skills which suggest a robust strategy that will be very successful.

## **8.2 Movement Strengthening**

YMCA Europe's strategy for movement strengthening is poor. It needs to make clear strategic decisions about field and partner groups, to invest heavily in YERT recruitment and purpose, to establish a framework to assess and measure the development stage of national movements and to re-invent movement strengthening in Eastern Europe as the focus moves to Western Europe. Investment of resource in new programmes should be conditional upon clarification of the ability and capacity of the national movement to deliver.

## **8.3 Management - YMCA Armenia**

YMCA Armenia is in a state of crisis with a non-functioning Board, poor relationship with local YMCAs and poor partnership working. As a result the camps are not working as shared partnership projects as originally planned and are losing potential. Communication with external partners is poor. There is a distinct lack of strategic planning and deteriorating relationships among senior staff that demands intervention from YMCA Europe. YMCA Europe can not allow national autonomy to stand in the way of their responsibility to the movement. YMCA Armenia should prioritise partnership support to YMCA Vardenis in order to improve business planning at Camp Daranak.

## **8.4 Management - YMCA Europe**

At the heart of many of the difficulties faced in the development of the camps lies poor leadership and management of the partnerships between regional, national and local YMCA. The lack of an effective due diligence process missed the gulf in capacity and skills that exists between the two national movements involved, subsequently missed the opportunity to target and improve weaknesses and as a result created the vacuum of leadership in Armenia that has been such a problem.

YMCA Europe failed to set in place any effective monitoring or partnership agreements when they handed responsibility over to national movements. A role was assigned loosely to field groups which when they closed down in Armenia and Georgia, was simply forgotten.

These omissions removed the ability and opportunity to support and steer progress where things went wrong, to withdraw funds and permissions if things went badly wrong and critically, to remain part of the strategic direction of the camps.

In all future projects where resource is handed over to national movements such agreements should be set in place and due diligence completed on the national movement as a condition of involvement. Steering or strategic oversight groups can also provide that ongoing monitoring of the big picture and achievement of outcomes.

YMCA Europe programmes should also produce clear, measureable outcomes that identify change and progress rather than targets that recognise delivery without assessing the result. YMCA Europe must establish a robust culture of monitoring and evaluation in order to better

demonstrate impact and to trigger continuous improvement.

### 8.5 Development Planning

The ideal structure for camp development, that aims to provide shared income for national and local YMCA, should be a partnership between national YMCA and local YMCA. At present the Armenian camps are working hard as local organisations, they would achieve so much more and be better together if they worked in partnership with national. Clear roles and responsibilities should clarify the role of the local YMCA in operating and managing the site and the strategic support and advisory role of the national organisation. Due diligence would initially be completed to ascertain the capacity of partners to deliver and clear agreement would be reached prior to launch on shared outcomes and on monitoring and evaluation.

The three camps in the Caucasus do not meet together regularly to share learning and strategy. This should be set in place even at this late stage and any new development elsewhere would benefit enormously from learning from their YMCA colleagues who have already walked this journey.

In evaluating this piece of work and identifying the learning for the future this report inevitably focuses on things that could have been done better and much of its content will naturally reflect that theme of improvement. However it is important to finish with a reinforcement of the conclusion that YMCA Europe's strategy to develop resource centres/camps as a means of growing the capacity and sustainability of dependent national movements is a sound one and one which deserves greater investment and a core place in future strategy for Movement Strengthening.

## 9. Recommendations

### 1) YMCA Europe should....

i) Introduce a culture of effective monitoring and evaluation across the organisation.

This should change the current system of measuring outputs (ie the things we do) to one of measuring outcomes (ie the change achieved as a result of the things we do).

This will require an investment in staff training and the ability to identify outcomes and to embed them into design of new programmes.

This will require an understanding of monitoring and evaluation as positive and helpful, welcoming change and improvement as strengthening our work.

ii) Develop a more robust Movement Strengthening strategy for growing movements.

Creating an effective measure of national movements that goes beyond tick box assessment to identify and support weaknesses by channelling support where its most needed. This measure should identify the stage of development appropriate to trigger independence for emerging national movements.

Should create a due diligence platform which can adapt to assess the capacity of partners to deliver programmes. This must be accompanied by the means to provide the support identified.

Should give strong leadership to the field and partner group system, to confirm its place in overall strategy, to subsequently either close down the programme or give improved direction to the programme and to review support needs where groups have closed.

Should revise and strengthen the tools and personnel available to the YERT programme.

iii) Design a more effective partnership approach.

Remaining involved alongside national and local YMCA delivery

Identifying clear roles and responsibilities for each partner.

Agreeing outcomes and monitoring processes prior to launch with agreed protocols in place for when things go wrong.

Setting in place a strategic partner group that can monitor the overall programme once or twice a year.

iv) Consider an extension of the camp development initiative to other countries

2) YMCA Armenia should....

i) Confirm its role as an active partner in the camp development programme and effectively re-engage with the local YMCAs concerned.

ii) Provide urgent support and guidance to YMCAs Vanadzor and Vardenis particularly in terms of effective partnership strategy and business planning.

iii) Develop effective networking among local YMCAs, sound strategic planning and more effective governance for the national movement.

iv) Establish a joint meeting of camp providers including input from YMCA Georgia

v) Review procedures for giving feedback to and updating partners to ensure efficient and effective communication.

3) YMCA Georgia should....

i) Confirm the plan for allocation of staff resources in the long term and adjust their strategy to ensure succession and continuity.

ii) Identify the strategy for growing the sustainability of local YMCAs in Georgia as a

result of the development of Camp Orange

iii) Confirm a clear marketing strategy for the campsite

4) YMCA Vardenis should....

i) Seek to extend their customer base to spread the risk of dependence upon World Vision.

ii) Confirm the strategic direction and purpose of the centre so as to better channel and focus marketing and sales.

iii) Prioritise the recruitment of business planning and camp development skills.

iv) Engage local communities as long term partners rather than as project clients and develop a fundable programme strategy in response.

5) YMCA Vanadzor should....

i) Establish a clear marketing strategy for the campsite



*Report commissioned by YMCA Europe from Amodo, [www.amodo.net](http://www.amodo.net)*