



հայաստան համահայկական հիմնադրամ  
The Armenia Fund



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Rural Development Program

DATE: 7 December, 2007  
FROM: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION OFFICE  
SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE OF THE ARMENIA FUND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

This week's report focuses on the Khashtarak cluster library improvement initiative, meetings with potential donors and preparation of the vocational training materials.

Today, December 7, is the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the devastating earthquake that hit Armenia, leaving tens of thousands of people dead and hundreds of thousands homeless. This tragedy left no one unaffected, as the whole international community participated in the massive rescue and rebuilding effort. Armenians all around the world united to help those whose lives were changed forever by the terrible event. A lot has been done, but the repercussions of the disaster can still be felt. Our thoughts are with all those who were directly or indirectly affected by this tragedy.

## **LIBRARY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE**



The Armenia Fund Rural Development Program staff and benefactor Shakeh Havan had a meeting with Tom Sloan, library specialist from the US and Nerses Hayrapetyan, director of the information resource center in the US embassy in Yerevan. The aim of the meeting was to consult with Mr. Sloan on the details of the rural library improvement initiative, which is currently entering implementation stage in two villages of the Khashtarak cluster.

With the realization of this initiative, we are trying to raise the bar for the rural libraries. In this sense, we are always looking forward to hearing an outside expert views and ideas. At the end of the day, the multi component solution will aim at integrating the international experience in the field, at the same time adapting it to Armenia's reality.



Mr. Sloan is the executive director of Southeast Florida Library Information Network. This was his third visit to the country. He provides expertise for the various library related projects, which the US embassy implements in Yerevan and elsewhere. During the meeting, we discussed the different approaches we are currently considering in the library improvement project. The basic dichotomy here is the technology reliance versus the printed materials.

Mr. Sloan's view on the issue was to minimize the amount of printed materials in the libraries, instead relying almost exclusively on digital information accessible through different computer software and the Internet. He noted that, in his opinion, the main task here was to create a positive environment for user experience bringing to the minimum the current controlling role of the librarians.

While agreeing on the importance of introducing new technologies in the rural areas and putting the stress on user experience, we think that it is also crucial to pay attention to creating an up to date and universally appealing physical stock of books and magazines, which would be aimed at different age groups including those who are not able to use the computer to search for information. We see the librarian as an important actor in the long term success of the project. It is the librarian's task to bring people back to the libraries and ensure the active participation of the younger generation in various extracurricular activities.

The upgraded libraries in the Khashtarak cluster communities of Azatamut and Lusahovit will embody many of the main features we will be trying to integrate on a wider scale to embrace all the rural libraries included in the Program.

## **CONTRIBUTING TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT**



On December 4, 2007, The Armenia Fund Executive Director Vahe Aghabegians and the Rural Development Program staff had a meeting with businessman Antranig Boghossian. Mr. Boghossian is interested in contributing to the Rural Development Program by supporting a project in a rural community.

Mr. Aghabegians presented the guest with the overall progress of the Program in the Khashtarak cluster, told him about the prospective clusters in Lori and Syunik regions and shared information on the upcoming economic facilitation and infrastructural development projects. Mr. Boghossian is



considering allocating certain funds to a specific rural development project. The key task here is finding the optimal solution by defining the project where that sum could be used most effectively.

Mr. Boghossian is one of many dedicated people who have expressed willingness to support The Armenia Fund's new initiative. This is the situation where an individual has certain capacity and a desire to help and all he/she needs is adequate information on the initiatives in the works. From there on, the potential donor will have the opportunity of choosing whether he wants to undertake a whole project or provide a solution to one of the components of a certain initiative. Thus, if a person has one thousand dollars, or ten thousand dollars that he's willing to contribute to the Program, the Fund will single out the ideal project, which would make the most of the specific sum.

The wide array of issues that The Armenia Fund Rural Development Program aims to solve provide us with the flexibility necessary to provide a whole spectrum of initiatives ranging from localized small scale endeavors to projects that would impact the whole region.

In the center of this Program is an individual, a child or an adult, living in a border area. We need to ensure that that person has all the necessary conditions for building a better life, whether it's school consumables or a new community center or an economic facilitation initiative.

## **VOCATIONAL TRAINING MATERIALS**

Work is underway on the preparation of the first vocational training video material, which will be issued on DVDs and given to the rural libraries. This DVD will be an element of a wide scale initiative to provide people in the border villages with access to information and know-how necessary to conduct the various agriculture related activities. Part of the current problems with developing efficient farming practice in the region is the lack of knowledge necessary to make changes and improvements.

The subject of the DVD is animal husbandry and proper cattle care. This topic is all the more important, considering the establishment of a milk collection unit in the cluster as part of the Rural Development Program economic facilitation projects. To ensure the success of this enterprise as a source of constant income for the members of the communities involved we need to help people maximize the capacity of their farms, at the same time improving the overall condition of cattle care. The current practice is obsolete.

The training DVD will include information on the possible improvements that can be made with minimum expenses but maximum results. It will also include practical advices from experts and farmers who have embraced the



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new technologies and techniques in cattle care. The DVD will become a base for a larger presentation, which will also include extensive printed materials to be distributed to the members of the community who will participate. We are planning to issue the DVD by the end of this month.