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The Armenia Fund



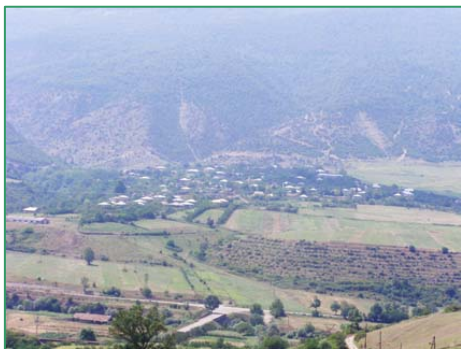
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Rural Development Program

DATE: 08 FEBRUARY, 2008
FROM: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION OFFICE
SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE OF THE ARMENIA FUND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

This week we bring you a batch of good news concerning the Aknaghbyur community (Tavush region) development initiative that will become a reality thanks to the support of the Armenian community in Switzerland. This was also the week when we finally wrapped the filming process on the first vocational training DVD and are currently busy putting it together with the technical assistance of Armenia TV.

We are excited to add a new feature to our weekly updates - meet the people section will focus on individuals who are involved in the Rural Development Program: people who have helped bring a project to life and individuals who live and try to build their lives in the border villages will both be in our spotlight. This is also something that we want to dedicate to everyone who cares and supports the Program. Today's meet the people is dedicated to Ms. Shakeh Havan who is currently sponsoring the renovation of the community library of Azatamut.

AKNAGHBYUR DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE LAUNCHED



The Swiss Armenian community was one of the first to believe in and embrace the idea of comprehensive development in Armenia's border villages. What's more, the community has committed to supporting a whole chain of improvement initiatives in the community of Aknaghbyur, one the six villages included in the Khashtarak cluster.

The first two projects in the pipeline will address the most pressing issues of drinking and irrigation water. With the Swiss Armenian community's support, we will now order the technical designs for the initiatives that will see a full scale rehabilitation of the obsolete water network.

In the village book of thousand and one problem, the water issue would probably be the most mentioned one. Most of the problems come from the



continuous lack of maintenance of pipes that mostly date back to the middle of the previous century. In the transition period, the problem was the absence of maintenance funds (or any other funds, for that matter) in the local administration budgets. Now, when the system is more or less in place and it is possible to direct some local funds for the maintenance it is often too little too late as most water pipelines, whether for drinking or irrigation purposes, are simply beyond repair.

Obviously, the burden of replacing an entire network is beyond the reach of any local administration budget and it is up to an external source to solve this problem. The Armenia Fund has a long history of being an efficient problem solution mechanism and the Rural Development Program will continue in the same vein. Rehabilitation of the infrastructure is one of the cornerstones of the Program. We believe that normally functioning and efficient infrastructure is essential for creating a positive environment for development.



The Swiss Armenian community also decided to support the parallel realization of three small projects in Aknaghbyur - all directed at tackling the information gap issue between the villages and their urban peers. The projects will see the local library equipped with an up to date computer and a printer. It will also receive a TV and a DVD player and an annual subscription to newspapers.

These projects will also bring an immediate and visible change into the lives of the people of Aknaghbyur and contain the promise of the more profound changes yet to come.

MEET THE PEOPLE: SHAKEH HAVAN

So - meet Shakeh Havan. In 1999, she moved to Armenia from the US with her family. She now runs (a very nice) Artbridge bookstore café in downtown Yerevan. Shakeh truly embraced the vision behind the Rural Development Program and was looking at ways to support it. When the Armenia Fund launched the rural library improvement initiative she knew she found a



perfect match and was constantly aboard the project that would breathe new life into the libraries of Azatamut and Lusahovit.



Books are an inseparable part of her personality, her business and the charity work she does. Other than the children's literature book featuring the best works of 9-14 year olds that she published, Shakeh has for years, on her own initiative and in collaboration with publishers, gathered books at reduced prices and distributed them to the regions of Armenia.

"I believe books should be bought and not received as charity items, says Shakeh. The best we could do for people who do not have access to the

bookshops of Yerevan and can not afford books at market prices is give them a chance to choose and buy books at a price they can afford to pay.

I don't want any foreign country to impact my culture, says Shakeh. We need to project our cultural development ourselves. We need an action plan.

When you renovate a school and leave the rest of the village in ruins, it will have no lasting impact. You can not refurbish a library and leave it at that. The Armenia Fund cluster idea attracted me, says Ms Shakeh, because it embraces development in all its aspects and each input, every project is reinforced by the other. I'll be learning from this process.

People keep saying "No one read books any more", adds Ms. Shakeh. But, the library can act as a community center. With the needed training and support the librarians can create the right atmosphere and we can create the place where the community gathers to discuss literature, art and social issues. I say the library needs to have a computer, a television set and a good collection of DVD-s, newspapers and magazines, even backgammon games, why not? It is not about fixing the walls, and putting more books on the shelves. The place needs to be alive and if 3 out of every 10 visitors read a book, then this project is a winner."