



հայաստան համահայկական հիմնադրամ
The Armenia Fund



ԳՅՈՒՂԱԿԱՆ ՉԱՐԳԱՅՍԱԼ ԾՐԱԳԻՐ
Rural Development Program

DATE: 16 May, 2008
FROM: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION OFFICE
SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE OF THE ARMENIA FUND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Last week we talked about the desperate conditions that people living in the villages near Armenia's border with Iran have to endure on a daily basis, conditions that have forced many families out of their homes and, most often - out of their country. This is a constant process and each new day with no improvement sees another family embark on an uncertain journey for a new home. For those who remain, the hope for a better future is a luxury they simply cannot afford. All this is about to change. The representatives of the Iranian Armenian community who joined us on our trip to the region will reach out to their compatriots and together we will work on bringing change and returning hope to these border villages.

NEWS AT A GLANCE

- This Thursday, representatives of Armenian Medical Union of France (UMAF) visited the border villages in Armenia's Lori region and conducted child eye care diagnostics trainings with the local medical staff. This is part of a larger initiative as the doctors will soon return to the villages with all the necessary equipment and medicine that will help tackle eye care related issues both for children and adults.
- Thanks to the efforts of the Armenia Fund US East Coast Affiliate office, Azatamut community school will soon have a computer lab that will function next to the school library. Apart from helping children develop their computer proficiency skills, this lab will allow the teachers to make use of the educational possibilities of the digital age (currently, because of the lack of equipment, the computer proficiency class is taught by drawing schemes on a blackboard).

... THERE IS A WAY

Using part of the famous phrase as the title of the article is not a coincidence. Indeed, where there is a will there is a way and the sixteen years of the Armenia Fund's work in Armenia and Artsakh are a powerful



testament to this notion. Time and again, Armenians around the world have demonstrated their unity within diversity by overcoming the most complex and seemingly insurmountable challenges and proving that no cause is lost till there are people who care and want to help. Today, the Iranian Armenian community has decided to extend a helping hand to the people living in the border villages of Meghri region to confront hopelessness and desolation.



Effectively deprived of drinking water, these communities are standing on a verge of full depopulation that will leave one of the key borders of Armenia empty. The many issues that the villages face today require a comprehensive solution, a solution that will bring both an immediate relief and a long term development prospect. Together with the representatives of the Iranian Armenian community we have started working on a development strategy that will help address these issues. This development strategy will embrace three border villages of Meghri region - Alvank, Shvanidzor and Nrnadzor and can be broken down into three categories: short term initiatives, mid term projects and long term goals.

The short term initiatives are aimed at bringing immediate relief to the communities and restoring the faith of people in a better tomorrow. These initiatives will include examination of the possibilities of reviving the *kahriz*



network (water collection networks still widely used in Iran). We will also tackle the issue of the absence of agricultural machinery by providing the communities with tractors. Another agriculture related project will see the planting of a variety of fruit trees to determine their productivity in the region and the viability of a larger initiative aimed at developing the potential of growing a specific cash crop that has an established market and can become a source of dependable income for the community members. We are also working on bringing together an initiative that will ensure the installation of street lighting in the villages.



The mid term projects will include the possibility of establishing milk collection/ dairy processing units in the region as an additional economic incentive. We will also contact fruit processing companies to understand the possibilities of establishing trade links with the beneficiary villages. This will partially

solve the market access problem that the villages have today. We will also explore the possibilities of installing water purification mechanisms to ensure that the water that the community members receive today meets all the sanitary norms. Unfortunately, this is not currently the case.

Our key long term goal is the solution of the drinking water issue as such. This issue is one of the main inhibitors on the way of normal development of the communities and the biggest catalyst of emigration. This massive endeavor will gradually establish an efficient water collection and distribution network that will guarantee that families living in these border villages have constant and dependable access to clean drinking water and never again have to wake up in the morning not knowing how to provide their child with a simple cup of tea. When realized, this initiative can help turn the tide of emigration and the new economic possibilities will help bring families back to their home villages.

There is a long and rocky road ahead the very survival of these vital border communities depends on the success of our efforts. Still, we firmly believe



that where there is a will there is a way and that together with our compatriots from Iran we will be able to make a difference and help the communities thrive again.

