



Հայաստանի Հանրապետական Հիմնադրամ
The Armenia Fund



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Rural Development Program

DATE: 21 December, 2007
FROM: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION OFFICE
SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE OF THE ARMENIA FUND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The emphasis of this week's report is on the village school furniture project to be implemented in collaboration with the Armenian School Fund, the development of the IT sector in the border villages, as well as preparation of the vocational training DVD on improving dairy production in the border farming households.

SCHOOL FURNITURE PROJECT



The task of improving lives in the border villages can be divided and subdivided into a massive amount of big and small initiatives, all of them important in their own right. In ensuring truly comprehensive development and feasible effect on peoples' lives none should or can be overlooked. Those can be infrastructural development projects or economic facilitation initiatives as well as social

welfare, cultural and other initiatives. It can be a computer for a rural library or an initiative that will create a workplace that will provide a border community member with stable income. Overall, we need to do everything and anything possible to keep the families living in the border villages together, so that people don't leave their loved ones and move abroad in search of work into an often hostile and hazardous environment.

Thus, a truly comprehensive approach should include a careful analysis of all available resources. The Armenia Fund Rural Development Program has been lucky to have the universal support in and outside Armenia, which gives the Program the flexibility of both taking on the projects by itself as



well as redirecting initiatives to the Fund's various partners, all of whom are united under the common goal of improving lives of Armenian people. In this sense, we need to understand, appreciate and make the most of our partners' strengths streaming the resources to finance various specialized projects. In the end of the day, the name of the implementer is not important, what really matters is what is done and the credit for positive changes in the border villages should be shared between all Armenians everywhere.

In this context, when The Armenia Fund was contacted by a benefactor wishing to sponsor the provision of furniture to villages in Rural Development Program, we immediately got in touch with the Armenian School Fund, which has considerable experience in providing children in cities and villages of Armenia with high quality furniture. After a short period of operative consultations between the potential benefactor, The Armenia Fund and Armenian School Fund, the project was passed on to be implemented by Armenian School Fund and a tentative timeframe was set for an early 2008 realization.

This process is very much in line with the overall concept of the Rural Development Program, where parallel implementation of a large spectrum of projects in one area guarantees comprehensive and accelerated results.

DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE BORDER VILLAGES



The development of IT sector and telecommunications in general is an integral and important part of The Armenia Fund Rural Development Program infrastructural development initiative. Access to information is what can and will help people in the border communities overcome the existing feeling of isolation. In this sense, the development of IT sector is as important as building roads. Just as economic development will allow the villages to be integrated back into the country's economy, the development of IT will facilitate the social integration process.

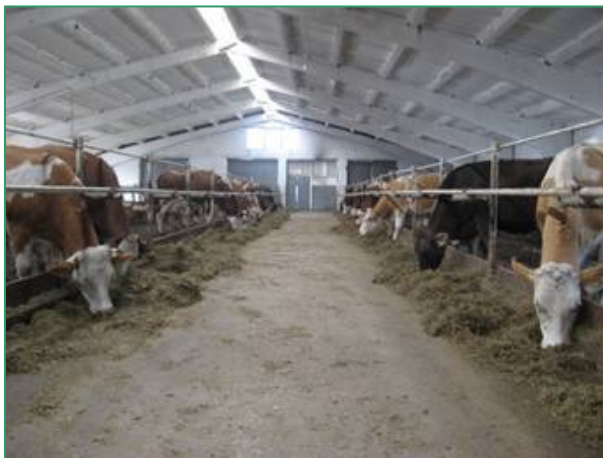
To find a comprehensive solution to this issue, we are constantly talking to various experts and IT companies from Armenia and abroad. There are a number of interesting proposals concerning the development of the field. One such proposal was presented by Michel Davoudian, the general manager of Ozone Belgium. The Ozone solution has the capacity of providing the villages with high speed Internet connection via a modern satellite system.



This proposal corresponds to The Armenia Fund strategy of raising the bar and providing the people in the border villages with best possible tools for development. At the same time, we need to take into account the existing situation where computers as such are not a common commodity in the border villages. Some schools have received computers as part of this or that initiative, but there is no qualified staff on the ground to conduct trainings with the students and adults. Thus, while aiming to develop the field, we need to find an adequate starting point, which is not necessarily the 21 century hi-tech. This is a process that needs to undergo localized development. Given the necessary incentive, a viable starting point, people will then themselves make the improvements, whether it is faster Internet, better computers etc.

In our opinion, a good launching for this process is the parallel provision of computers, printers and training to the rural community libraries which should become vocational training centers for all the members of the communities, putting an extra emphasis on teaching and involving the young generation. The libraries will also become public Internet access points, which will give the initial impulse to the development of the field.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING MATERIALS



As part of the preparation process of the vocational training DVDs The Armenia Fund Rural Development staff made a working visit to two farming entities to gather practical information and footage. The animal farming techniques that are being applied in Armenia nowadays are obsolete and are sometimes harmful both for the productivity of the animals and their health. Apart from the financial difficulties that the farmers face, there is also a lack of practical information concerning the matter.

One of the farms used as a source for the footage on the DVD is Dilli farm near Dilijan in Tavush region. The structure and operation of "Dilli" LLC meets European standards, which enables us to provide the viewer with information on the rules and regulations of animal husbandry.

The compiled footage is complete with structure and internal layout of the barn, brightness, air ventilation - the latter is a major health hazard in Armenia – fodder (this includes preparing the combined feed in mixers,



growing corn and preparing silage), watering, insemination (we managed to obtain footage of one of the animals being artificially inseminated by the technician), manure handling (the farm recycles its manure and uses it as compost in the field to grow corn for silage).

The second stop was a cooperative farm situated in the Gegharkoonik region's Vahan village. This farm was one of the USDA sponsored projects. The main objective of this project was to introduce the idea of roofed open free stall barns, which would provide animals with shelter from the sun, wind, rain and snow and plenty of fresh air at all times. Vahan was the first village where this experimental project was carried out. And contrary to what people knew, the animals remained healthy throughout winter while the temperature dipped down to as much as - 30 °C.

The making of the DVD will interlink with the milk collection unit project and present a comprehensive solution to the issue of improving the dairy production techniques and thus the output.

As a follow up to the trip we will interview specialists in Yerevan, re-visit an open air farm for further footage. You can find the photo report on the trip at <http://himnadram.org/villages/photostory/index.html>.