



հայաստան համահայկական հիմնադրամ
The Armenia Fund



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Rural Development Program

DATE: 29 FEBRUARY, 2008
FROM: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION OFFICE
SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE OF THE ARMENIA FUND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

This week we'll talk about our meeting with the SDC and an expert from the Springfield Centre for business in development. We also launch a new section of our weekly reports aiming to depict the life and problems that our border villages face in...numbers. Not being a lyrical device, numbers can, however, sometimes speak much louder than words.

We also have a new video sequence for you and a couple of questions to go with it: everyone likes trains, right? Would you ride this train? Would you ride this train twice every day, each time waiting for it to arrive in an unheated station and never being sure that it ever will?



Follow the link to see the video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVyS2qkUeZo>

This is the regular train that serves the needs of the people of Armenia's Shirak region. It has not been replaced for more than forty years and still bears the (now rusty) symbols of the Soviet Empire. Convenience and comfort are two things one will not find here.

Other news at a glance:



- A cargo jet has just landed in Yerevan, carrying the first two automated milking units to be distributed to dairy farmers in the border villages.
- Today, the reconstruction was completed on the Azatmut library. Both workers and volunteers (mostly students) from the community were actively involved in this process. The first parcel with new books has already arrived in the community and will be followed by new equipment and, naturally, a lot more books.
- On Saturday, a truck will arrive from Lori to transport the remaining school furniture to the region's border villages.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMY: WHICH COMES FIRST?

On February 28, 2008, the Armenia Fund Executive Director Vahe Aghabegians and the Rural Development Program staff had a meeting with the Regional Director for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation Derek Mueller, SDC's country coordinator for Armenia Zara Allahverdian and David Elliott, a development expert from the Springfield Centre (UK). The focus of the meeting was on the current activities of the Rural Development Program and the various possibilities for cooperation between the two organizations.



The SDC and the Armenia Fund are already working together on an initiative aimed at improving the quality of the veterinary services in the border villages of the Khashtarak cluster in Tavush region. The Armenia Fund's job of tackling a variety of issues in over 150 border villages of Armenia is a fertile ground for expanding that existing cooperation and widening its focus to join forces

and work out feasible solutions to seemingly impossible tasks.

One of the aspects of cooperation that was discussed during the meeting with the SDC and development expert David Elliott was the economic facilitation element of the Rural Development Program. This is a relatively new direction for the Armenia Fund that until the launch of the Rural Development Program has mostly concentrated its efforts on implementing infrastructure amendment projects.



One may argue that it's wrong to wander off the established course but the reality is that new times bring new challenges and with new challenges comes the need to adopt. In today's Armenia, simply restoring the infrastructure is not enough to ensure a person in a border village a better life. If the economic development does not walk along with the improvement of infrastructure, a better road will only ensure a faster escape route for a border community member. Or what good is the access to gas if you have no money to pay for it?

This is why, the economic facilitation initiatives are an absolute priority for and a cornerstone in the Armenia Fund Rural Development Program. This is also a sphere where SDC's and Springfield Centre's expertise could be very valuable in developing an overall development strategy and building inner capacity for effectively bringing economic concepts to life. This economic action plan, with certain adjustments, would be applicable to most of the border villages included in the Program. A lot has been tried and many helpful lessons have been learned in the process of working in the pilot Khashtarak cluster. All this data can serve as a viable basis for developing that strategy.

BORDER VILLAGES IN NUMBERS

Below is a random pick of figures that reflect some of the everyday problems that people living in the border villages face every day.

2

The number of hours to get to Tashir (Lori region) 150km away from Yerevan

1.5

The number of hours to get to the border village of Dzyunashogh just 10km away from Tashir

3

Distance of Dzyunashogh community from the state border in kilometers (1.84 miles)





1225

Number of people living in the Isahakyan community (Shirak region)

1

Number of wells serving the drinking water needs of the community

0.5

Liters of water (0.132 gallons) an Isahakyan community member receives per day



2049

Number of households in the six border villages of the Khashtarak cluster

891

Number of cows in the Khashtarak cluster communities

0.43

Number of cows per household for the Khashtarak cluster community members that see animal husbandry as their primary hope for economic revival



1,000,000

Number of problems that the border communities of Armenia face today

1

Number of people it takes to make a difference

