



հայաստան համահայկական հիմնադրամ
The Armenia Fund



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Rural Development Program

DATE: 23 November, 2007
FROM: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION OFFICE
SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE OF THE ARMENIA FUND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Apart from the Telethon 2007 on our schedules, this week was business as usual for the Rural Development Program. Our weekly update includes information on a seminar conducted in the Khashtarak cluster in cooperation with the Armenian Technology Group (ATG), the library project in the cluster villages and attendance of the Peace Corps annual conference.

DITAVAN VILLAGE SEMINAR



On November 20, 2007, The Armenia Fund Rural Development Program staff and representatives of the Armenian Technology Group (ATG) visited Khashtarak cluster's Ditavan community. The purpose of the visit was the organization of a seminar with the local farmers on proper pesticide use.

The event is yet another element in The Armenia Fund's complex initiative of dynamic cooperation with local and international organizations. The aim is to coordinate and focus their efforts in Armenia's border areas.

The seminar was presented by Rose Kachadoorian, a pesticide registration specialist working for the Department of Agriculture in Salem, Oregon, US. The theme of the presentation was the overall risk factor and the necessary precautions to be taken while using various chemicals. Ms. Kachadoorian noted that, in the present situation, there are a number of serious issues concerning the field of pesticide use in Armenia.

One of the existing problems in Armenia is the inadequate labeling of the chemicals on sale. Most of the labels do not give sufficient information on the dangers of this or that chemical both for humans and plants. This leads to open sale of extremely hazardous substances with no proper precaution



or safety instructions. Ms. Kachadoorian distributed brochures containing detailed description on the usage and hazards of the most common chemicals used by the farmers.

Among other issues Ms. Kachadoorian singled out the protective gear necessary during working with pesticides. This is yet another neglected field, where even the basic gear such as rubber gloves and goggles are not used and most of the pesticides are applied with bare hands with complete disregard to any safety precautions. The expert detailed on the whole process of applying pesticides especially focusing on the treatment of various chemical-use related injuries and the simple procedures which greatly reduce the risk of contamination. The presentation was followed by questions and answers section. At the end of the seminar, the community members present at the event received certificates of participation.

The Armenia Fund sees the organization of similar seminars as well as preparation and active distribution of vocational training materials as one the ways of improving the current situation and raising the overall awareness of the farmers on this and other subjects. As a follow up, the Rural Development Program Staff will have a meeting with Ms. Kachadoorian to talk about her further involvement in preparing the vocational training materials.

LIBRARY UPGRADE INITIATIVE



As a follow up to the visit to the Khashtarak cluster on November 12, the Rural Development Program staff had a meeting with Shakeh Havan, who gave general approval and committed to sponsoring the library upgrade initiative in the cluster villages. One of our follow up tasks will include the drafting of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will include the description of the project components, implementation timeline, budget etc.

During the meeting, we elaborated on some of the finer details of the project such as ensuring the long term sustainability of the enterprise, diversifying the various activities to be carried out as part of library project and determining a viable training and cooperation mechanism for the local staff.

There are several issues to be addressed in developing a library not just as a mere book storage facility, but a vibrant cultural hub. When trying to find the right formula for the library structure: required space, amount of books per capita etc., we tried to look at the existing standards for the rural libraries in Armenia. It came out that the current standards and regulations



are obsolete and it is left to the diligence of the village library administration staff to determine how to run the place. Because of this, while implementing this initiative we will take as our basis the library standards in Europe and the US and try adapting them to Armenia's realities.

Parallel to this, in the framework of the same project, we are looking at a number of other initiatives aimed at revitalizing the stale cultural life in the communities involved in the project. These include the organization of various festivals and events, bringing in the talent from Yerevan to perform in the villages and using every opportunity to promote the cultural and social activeness of the young generation.

As a subcomponent of the project, we are planning to conduct training courses for the staff of the community libraries in Azatamut and Lusahovit, which are included in the first phase of the initiative. These courses will include info tours to Armenia's main libraries where they will see the inner workings of a larger system and understand the ways of bringing that experience back to the village.

At the end of the day, we see the improved village libraries as a proactive source of after school activities for students of all age groups, which will include a wide array of initiatives ranging from computer proficiency classes to drama classes and book reading clubs. The librarian needs to be able to organize all these events, to be the driving force for the project. Thus, the human factor in this project is very important and we need to pay serious attention to the adequate training of the person in charge.

PEACE CORPS CONFERENCE

On November 19, 2007, The Armenia Fund Rural Development Program staff was invited to participate in the Peace Corps annual conference. During the conference, Hayk Petrosyan, the coordinator of the Program, presented the gathered with the overall concept of the Fund's new initiative, as well as elaborated on some of the projects in the pilot Khashtarak cluster.

The Peace Corps in Armenia currently has around 84 volunteers, living and working in all the regions of the country, most of them in the rural areas. The age of the volunteers ranges from 20 to 78 years old. These are all qualified professionals who are ready to work for the good of the communities they live in. This is a very valuable asset and we see a strong potential for cooperation between the two organizations. Together with the Peace Corps staff in Armenia, we will explore the various possibilities for collaboration in the near future.