

## Factsheet

Village women are invisible for the press



In the framework of the annual initiative entitled "Women make the news" dedicated to the 8th of March UNESCO called on mass media to keep particularly village women in focus, who remained invisible for the world. "Women comprise 24% of people who are heard of and read about in the world news, village woman in particular..."

According to the results of the conducted in 2011 with the title of "A woman's image in the Armenian press", women make up 14% of images represented in the mass media, while village women are only 0, 1%:

They can feed 150 million hungry people



"If village women have equal access to resources, the productivity would increase to the level of being able to feed 150 million hungry people"- this is how the UN Secretary General assessed the situation on the occasion of International Women's Day speaking on the "Enlargement of village women rights and opportunities; no hunger, no poverty topic.

The level of poverty in Armenia has not gone down



According to official statistics the poverty rate constitutes 35, 8%, which means that more than one-third of the population is poor. These are the people whose monthly income does not exceed the income of AMD 33,500 which is the minimum threshold of the poverty.

Concerns are raised that the number of people living in extreme poverty has more than doubled and reached 3%. These are the citizens whose monthly income does not exceed AMD 19 000.

Large families and rural households lead by women are considered to be more vulnerable.

It is worth reminding that 27, 6 % of population was considered to be poor before the economic crisis.

# Woman & politics

April 2012

"We must prove what the matriarchy is capable of", said the members of women co-operative in Hermon village

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With the typical stubbornness and unbreakable spirit of a fighter they overcome the difficulties, struggle with nature's sporadic trials, cultivate the soil, reap a harvest, and raise animals, not only tending their family's concerns but also playing a large part in the development and prosperity of their community. Unfortunately too frequently they remain unnoticed and ignored, when in fact, their work is true heroism.

## Heroic women "squeezing bread out of stone"

...Mrs. Satenik was carefully laying the table with the freshly baked lavash, honey and beeswax brought from her native Aramous village, as well as vegetables and fruits she has grown and cultivated with her own hands during a year. Mrs. Rima's table is also fascinating with variety of colorful and tasty dried fruits from Arevshat village. Walnut, oil, honey, dessert, cheese, canned food and art crafts - this was the pavilion for the guests from the remote Amasia...

This is how our women celebrated the Women Month in the frameworks of "Heroic woman in the sector of agricultural production" award ceremony organized by Oxfam-GB Armenia and the Armenian Young Women's Association. The participants were gathered at Congress Hotel on March 8th and the event was attended by women who came from all marzes of Armenia.

The contest is unique in its type which allowed the participants reveal those women who accomplished encouraging results in agricultural industry and farming enterprises. The event also extended them an opportunity to share their experiences, best practices and the path they passed through.

Over 100 applications were received around Armenia. There was no age limit and the oldest

participant was 76 and the youngest one was 19 years old. It worth mentioning, that besides Oxfam beneficiaries the contest was attended by new private entrepreneurs, who were not familiar even to the contest organizers. In fact, all those women who participated and enlightened the others about the difficult path they passed through can be considered as women heroes struggling against hardships.

Thus, it was quite a difficult task to make a decision and the preference was given to those women who could "squeeze bread out of stone" and receive good harvest, as well supported their community, served as a role

model or created employment opportunities.

Out of all participants, 11 women were nominated as "Women heroes" and 6 women received appreciation certificates.

As per UN request, this year March 8th was dedicated to rural women issues under the title "No to hunger and poverty". By the way, the concept is very alike with the World Campaign announced by Oxfam GROW under the motto "A hunger-free world - Let us grow more and feed the Earth".

More details about the contest participants is available at [WomenNet.am](http://WomenNet.am)



The most important aspect that unites the "Heroic woman in the sector of agricultural production" award ceremony winners is that all of them are surely creative, optimistic and full of prosperous plans. They are keen to expand their activities, conquer new markets and conviction to develop agro-tourism.

"They are women that enact changes, who can successfully overcome the challenges in the sphere, improve the households and community lives," this way Oxfam GB Armenia Country Director Margarita Hakobyan described the contest winners.

## Congratulations

We congratulate all the "Heroic woman in the sector of agricultural production" nominees and those received appreciation certificates.

Aida Avetisyan, Shirak marz, Amasis village;  
Vera Grigoryan, Aragatsozn marz, Oshakan village;  
Armine Asalyan, Lori marz, Lori Berd village;  
Alvard Shahnazaryan, Gegharkunik marz, Ttujur village;  
Sara Alishanyan, Ararat marz, Ginevet village;  
Emma Hakobyan, Tavush marz, Gandzakar village;  
Gayane Petrosyan, Tavush marz, Aknaghbyur village;  
Armenuhi Stepanyan, Syunik marz, Darbas village;  
Naira Mnatsakanyan, Vayots Dzor marz, Hermon village;  
Haykush Yenokyan, Armavir marz, Aknashen village;  
Satenik Ghazaryan, Kotayk marz, Aramus village;  
Shaghik Mkhitarian, Tavush marz, Aknaghbyur village;  
Javahir Dallakyan, Lori marz, Shamlugh town;  
Aghunik Hazryan, Shirak marz, Aregnadem village;  
Rima Simonyan, Ararat marz, Arevshat village;  
Susanna Movsisyan, Ararat marz, Shahumyan village;  
Narine Mkrtychyan, Vayots Dzor marz, Areni village;  
"Lusaber" Women Committee, Ararat marz, Nizami village.

**Women who enact changes**

**"It is happiness when one does what he likes" ...**



The dark and murky weather cleared away instantly when we stepped into Mrs. Haykanush's large greenhouse. It was green all around and the big vigorous tomatoes were ripe red...

How to organize greenhouse production, properly fertilize the land, fathom which of the seed sorts are early-ripening or which of them are high yielding ones... Haykanoush Yenokyan, the farmer of Aknashen village, is ready to listen to people she knows as well the strangers who address her with requests. Her cellular phone is never silent and she describes her readiness in the following words "I won't be able to sleep at night otherwise".

The farm she established has a long story. "After the collapse of the Soviet Union, like everyone else I also started to think on how I could support my family. During those years I used my savings to buy a computer. Since I was profoundly interested in seeds, I found and set contacts with the biggest seed company," tells Mrs. Haykanush, who soon became one of the pioneers in importing seeds from abroad. Gradually her business expanded, Haykanoush opened a seed-store and she became the official distributor of Netherlands based "Seminis" seed company.

The formula of happiness is the confidence she gained gradually. Her next interest was the farming where she started to test good and bad seeds, measure plant growth and crop yields and this is how the greenhouse was set up. In the greenhouse they apply all the modern technological solutions: drip irrigation and bee pollination.

"Years ago, when my uncle's wife was telling that she greatly enjoyed land cultivation, for some reason I didn't imagine that... But now the same feeling assails me when I tour in the greenhouse, control the works, and follow the plants growth. I don't even notice how the time passes quickly. It's a great happiness when one does his/her favorite work," she adds.

Mrs. Haykanoush employed 10 women from the village.

"Our farmers have a great sense of responsibility towards their work. I teach them all I know, I coach them which leaf to remove, whether to touch a plant or not, etc. All my workers are skilled agronomists." -says the farmer.

Mrs. Haykoush has graduated from Yerevan State University, Department of Chemistry and her education is assisting her greatly.

"When I read the notes about fertilizers or chemical weed and pesticides, I understand the whole process. Sometimes when I don't have the required substance, I add some alternative stuff," she adds.

Haykanoush stays loyal to her curious nature and finds new interests for herself.

"Recently I have started to read books about bees. The topic is very interesting to me and I wish I could know everything about the bees."

Perhaps her new hobby will later become a new business for Mrs. Haykoush, who knows...

**My mother used to tell me, "You are born for the village life" ...**

Sara Alishanyan was showing us their garden with an admiration and affection, despite an unattractive and early-spring appearance of trees. She was talking about the trees, their history and the quantity of the harvest in such a descriptive manner that it was possible to imagine the fruitful garden with fruits in the fall.

Here is a well-cultivated garden, a small hen-house, where hens and turkeys are fighting with each other. During all seasons Mrs. Sara starts the day similarly – too much in the to-do-list. But as she states she does everything with absolute pleasure.

"We used to live in a private house in Yerevan, where we had a small greenhouse and I used to sow different vegetations and grow flowers. I do like the land works. My mother used to tell me "You are born for the village life..." And so these words became a reality, I met my husband, we fell in love and I moved to live in Ginevet village. I have always liked the life here. We have three daughters and they are the joy of our house..."

Sara is still fond of flowers which decorate not only the yard but also all the windowsills of the house.

"I enjoy when see the trees in blossom and the bees are buzzing around the trees. I like the sound of bee-buzzing a lot! I often approach the apricot-trees in blossom and smell their scent. During the harvest season we all work together. We gather and sort the harvest. Grandpa takes the harvest to the market. We have early ripening apple trees, pear trees, cherry trees, apricot trees, sweet fig and walnut trees."

Every corner at home reminds that the hostess prepared all with her own hands: tablecloths, pot holders, bedspreads, even the curtains are done by Sara. She knows all types of handcrafts: stitching, needlework, shuttle work, macrame, etc.

Years ago Mrs. Sara had even established a small club in their vil-



lage. "In the beginning, the classes were run in our house, where I gathered children around the heating stove and taught them hand crafts. Later, the school principle provided us with a classroom."

Sara Alishanyan leads an active social life as well. She has been elected as the Chair of the Parent Council of the school. Later she became one of those 8 members of Board for School Trustees.

After dealing with this dynamic, inquisitive and creative woman, who doesn't like to speak about difficulties, one can realize that the Armenian villages survive due to women like Sara is.

**"I love the land and soil and with love has a good result for sure"**



The "tastiest" corner in Ms. Armine's house is indeed the cellar. There all fall goods with special womanly care are shelved next to each other – canned food, jams, juices, as well as fruits and vegetables ... in brief, everything that she grew during the year.

It is the result of Armine Stepanyan's everyday hard work that even on the coldest winter days her house is warm and full of tasty dishes. Armine lives in the distant village of Darbas.

- We have a cup of coffee early in the morning, before the sunrise

and start working, says Ms. Armine. – During Soviet times I worked at the factory and life was easier but after privatization in the country we needed to somehow live on. There was no other choice and I started cultivating the land. Life made me take that decision.

Participating in the "Water- to- market" project of the "Millennium Challenge Account – Armenia" project, she received water pipes which have made the irrigation of the plot of land at some distance from her home, easier. Potatoes, cabbage, beans, tomatoes, peppers ... Besides this, Armine also grows fruit trees (pear, sour cherry, walnut, apple). Armine Stepanyan always helps the other residents of the community with the seedlings she has grown and flower seeds, and the harvest and blessings she reaps. Despite the fact that land cultivation is a hard work, she also engages in husbandry (breeds pigs, sheep, hens and cows).She says: "there can't be a village house without domestic animals".

People in all festivities and events in the village, be it a birthday party or a wedding, enjoy cakes baked by Armine. Festive cakes she bakes are as well designed and tasty as cakes made by professionals.

- I am a self-learner, I learnt by doing and I love baking.

However, Armine does not complain off many problems she encounters and the routine hard work she does. She sustains not only her family but also helps her relatives. She considers her greatest achievements in life to be her 4 daughters. When she speaks of them her eyes shine with joy. She found her own formula of success a long time ago. It goes:

- Love. I love the land and soil; and whatever you do with love has a good result for sure.

**"I sing with them, and they joyfully get alive"**

"When the man who gave me the seedlings was interestingly surprised when seeing the harvest. He wanted to know what did I do to the plants and I replied that I sing with them and they joyfully get alive," tells Satenik Ghazaryan, a farmer from Aramous village about her first high-yield crop.

Mrs. Satenik carefully cuts the "Dal" – a dish made with foremilk - and served her guests. In the meantime, the tonir (a big clay jar situated in the ground and after burning fire inside of it is possible to bake lavash inside of it) became hot in which fresh and warm lavash bread is to be baked. The dough rolls carefully put on the table wait for their turn to be baked. Satenik's sister rolls out the dough into thinner sheets and then Mrs. Satenik patts the sheets of lavash from one hand to the other twirling them in a circular motion.

Memories follow one another... "In my childhood my mother used to teach us how to roll out the dough. The edges should be thin, and when you twirl them with hands, they become more even and the center of lavash doesn't get burnt," explains Mrs. Satenik.

In order to make the scene more colourful and vivid, the baking process is accompanied by folksongs. The time runs fast with Mrs. Satenik's hospitable family, and for a moment you forget about the way back.

Satenik Ghazaryan is not only one of the farm-

ers of Aramous village but she has also been a librarian in the Cultural Centre for 25 years.

"In 1987 when I got married I started to work in the library. While taking care of my baby I was pararely studying, but I did manage to combine everything. One day trainings on crop cultivation launched in our village. I started to attend the trainings... As a result, "Millennium Challenges Foundation – Armenia" supported establishment of a polyethylene greenhouse which is already 5 years. The only condition the Foundation required was to build the greenhouse in a public place so everyone could easily access it and see the cultivation works."

"Throughout these years I used to grow various crops in the open field but cultivation in a greenhouse is quite different. You seem to live with these plants; you witness the growth day by day."

On top of this, Mrs. Satenik is also a good beekeeper.

"Seven years ago we saw a beautiful bee-cluster on our tree and we put them in a box. Then my husband had to leave the country and asked me to take care of them if I could, yet I had no idea about beekeeping before. My father recommended me to address the bee-keeper based in our village and I applied him for assistance. He was doing the whole work himself and to my questions and requests to teach me, he used to say: "You are not going



to be a bee-keeper, aren't you?"

Mrs. Satenik, however, stood firm on her decision and soon found a way out. Thanks to the books in the library she studied beekeeping and the result was yet to come.

Today Mrs. Satenik expanded number of beehives to 45 units.

"We have more spare boxes; hence I am planning to increase the number of beehives."

Materials developed by Lilit Kochinyan

**Key for success**

**A small part of nature**

**“A woman living in the village is closer to nature, to be clearer, they are a part of nature because due to her efforts and care, the seeds sown grow and yield harvest”, says Armine Asulyan who lives in Lori Berd village of Lori Region.**

Armine is 32 years old, but she is already known in the village as a skilled farmer and many people consult with her on how to sow, cultivate various plants and what kind of harvest to expect. Armine acquired all of these skills from her parents, to which she added her love towards farming and the wish to learn new things.

“I don’t even remember when I started land cultivation. I used to help my mother to grow beans, cucumbers and other vegetables. When already 12 I helped my father to mow the grass and everybody was surprised as they realized that such hard work was done only by men.

Armine is married now; she has three children and a small household where she grows fruit trees, wheat, beans, cucumbers, potatoes and other vegetables. But most of all she is proud of her wonderful roses; no one can pass by being indifferent to these flowers. “They are my queens”- she smiles. Armine isn’t less enthusiastic when she talks about her grapes. They have grown and lashed so

nicely; her husband constructed a wonderful pavilion with vines last summer where they like to sit, dine and talk about children, harvest and their future plans during long summer evenings.

Armine does not engage in cultivation only, she also deals with husbandry.

“I have two cows, two heifers, hens, geese and pigs, but I am thinking of increasing the stock of the animals, as my helping hands are growing up”, she said and remembered an incident from her childhood. I was still in school when our lamb was born in the field, I carried the lamb home on my shoulders and didn’t want to drop it as I was afraid that thorns could injure its feet or get tired and fall down. Those who have been Armine’s guests surely tasted madzoun /natural yogurt/, butter, sour cream and halva made by her that simply melt in the mouth.

I grow and cook everything for my children so that they eat organic food and be healthy. It is an indescribable feeling when you plant a seed with the size of less than a centimeter and grow it, get harvest, cook it and serve it to your relatives- says Armine and notes that it would be also great if she could sell those products.

She is busy in winter also as she grows room plants. Among them she takes special care of the “tree of happiness”.



-When we have difficulties, the flowers wilt and turn yellow and when we overcome the problems they start to bloom and become fresh again. It is an amazing flower; if I didn’t have it, I’d never believe in that miracle.

By the way, Armine also engages in social work. She is a member of local council of child rights protection. Recently with her help the custody of a grandchild was given to the grandmother.

*Karine Petrosyan*

**“It’s the village that sustains the city”**



**Recalling the tastiest memories has become Vera Grigoryan’s beloved activity. She shows colorful dried fruits and sujukh that is made of walnuts and special grape paste.**

Vera rolls back the coil of the history and remembers with a smile her Tamar grandma’s sujukhs that were hung on the rope in the yard.

-We cunningly and stealthily tried to approach sujukhs and could cut some pieces, then we used to shorten the strings...- says Vera and laughs; she is now a master of dried fruits.

35 types of dried fruits, many exhibitions and certificates are the result of her 10-year work.

The production of traditional dried fruits has its history. Vera Grigoryan is from Oshakan village. “Oshakan is the center of dried fruits as children see and eat dried fruits from the very day they are born”, says Vera.

Mrs. Vera is a pedagogue by her specialty. She was the director of Oshakan School for 5 years.

When I was a school director, we used to have lots of guests and treat them to my dried fruits. Many of them wanted to buy some... At that time I had the idea of uniting a few women and starting our own business. Our first client was the Embassy of Great Britain. Then we created our own company. Mrs. Vera’s dried fruits have a huge success not only in Armenia but also abroad. She has also created new types of dried fruits. Dried tomatoes are one of her newly created types which is used in salads. It has a high demand and sometimes is called simply “Vera’s Salad”. Vera Grigoryan is also involved in public activities. She is the founder of the “Village woman” NGO with the following slogan: “It’s the village that sustains the city”.

**Inovations**

**Let us show what matriarchy is capable of**

**Two of cooperatives in the villages of Yeghegis and Hermon established in the framework of the Oxfam’s “Sustainable livelihoods” project in the 5 villages of Vayots Dzor region are supervised by women.**

Hermon is the poorest community of the Region settled by the refugees.

Naira Mnatsakanyan has been living for 15 years in Hermon. Although she is a teacher, she has been a bee keeper and gardener for over 10 years.

Naira Mnatsakanyan assumed the position of president of the agricultural cooperative at the nomination of her fellow villagers. She has a lot of experience in agriculture. Due to her diligence and initiative she can unite and lead people.

“The members of our cooperative are only women and this fact empowers us to do more and do it better. We should prove what matriarchy is capa-

ble of” she jokes.

Our cooperative is just one year old and during that time lots of achievements were recorded. Both the members and villagers are very enthusiastic about it. Refugee women members of the cooperative, apart from securing jobs and helping raise the standard of living of their families, have contributed greatly to the development of the community by growing more lively and resistant non-traditional vegetables such as broccoli, kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts, “cherry” tomatoes and chili peppers.

“Hermon, being a border village resettled with refugees seems to have been overlooked by the state; whereas here, more than any other region, we feel the need for assistance and support. I am proud that I could contribute to the establishment of this agricultural cooperative”, says Naira Mnatsakanyan



meanwhile emphasizing that their cooperative is the guarantee of welfare in the whole community.

*Ninel Hovhannisyann*

**How to develop agro tourism**

One of the innovative goals of Oxfam’s “Sustainable livelihoods” project is the development of agro tourism in rural communities, that can be a real alternative source of income.

- Tourism is a prospective area especially for our region, as we have many resources”, says Ruzanna Ghazaryan, the president of “Work and Moth-

erland” NGO actively working in the field of agro tourism development in the region with Oxfam’s support.

A lot of trainings were conducted for building the capacity of village residents, specifically explaining them how to make community more attractive, improve sanitation and roads and historical monuments.

In the framework of the above men-

tioned project “Vayots Dzor” information tourist guide was published last year which is useful for tourists to be guided in the Region. The “Traditional kitchen of Vayots Dzor” book is in the process of publication right now. In general, agro and eco-tourism provide large perspectives within rural community development”, stated the NGO president.

**On the verge of survival**

**“I don’t want to forget that I am a woman”**

**“God, please keep us away from tears”, says 46-year-old Karine Karapetyan and her eyes fill with tears. She lost her three children when she was young. Her neighbors said that the children died from hunger and cold.**

Karine got married when she was very young. Her husband is the village herdsman and she milks cows in the village. The money they can hardly be enough to meet the needs of their eight children only. The house that Karine’s family lives in looks horrible; they simply live in inhuman conditions.

Karapetyan’s large family lives in the watch-booth of the ex-collective farm. “We have no money, we have nothing that is why we live in that booth”, Karine says. One room in the house serves both as a dining room, a bedroom, a kitchen and a bathroom. The roof is dripping, walls are damp, if you touch the bed linen they seem to be wet. I put the tub in the middle of the room and bathe the children. Then I myself take a bath. Our toilet is the canyon next to our house. “I do my laundry in the yard, as well as cooking and dishwashing”, says Karine shamefully meanwhile remembering the time when she put her baby to sleep in the tub. The main income of the family is AMD 50 000 – the social allowance they receive for children.

- “I paid AMD11 000 for a sack of flour. It will be enough only for making dough twice”, Karine says.

Her two sons left school from the 8th grade to help their father. They pasture cows and accompany Karine when she goes to milk cows in the village.

“They are used to all that work, as they live in the village. Education can offer nothing, it’s better to work from the early age, keep the house, feel the bitterness of bread earning and understand that after having their own families they should not live in such a hole and grow children”, says Karine.

TV set is their only contact with the world. Karine confesses that she is also fond of soap operas and different TV programs; she watches and then dreams.

“I look at women who live in the city and envy them. I want to open my eyes in a warm house, send my children to school, see my husband with a decent job, cook in my kitchen, drink coffee with my neighbors, take a shower in the bathroom: simply not to forget that I am a woman”, Karine says.

Karine does not remember when she bought clothes for herself last. Once she milked a cow and they gave her a dress instead of money. That is the only ‘new’ dress of hers without a ‘stain’. “I am used to these conditions so what’s the use of feeling bad without good clothes. With that money I can buy bread or some medicine for my children. My only concern is the absence of the house and managing food for kids. I cooked soup with peas today”, says Karine.

The dining table they have is very small; there are only a few chairs so they have to take turns to have a meal.

There is an unconstructed building near Karine’s house. It is the house that the Government promised to rebuild for their large family. “The ex-governor of Shirak Region came and saw the conditions we live in and told us not to worry as the Government was going to give us a house. The construction started but suddenly stopped. They say there is no money.”

*Hasmik Harutyunyan*  
Nor Kyanq village, Shirak region

**Join Us, Sign the Petition**

The Civil Society Cooperation Network, which unites 27 “OXFAM” partner- NGOs, calls on all concerned citizens to join its petition, appealing to the political parties participating in the 2012 elections of the National Assembly of RA, to the party leaders and women included in the proportional electoral lists.

The appeal specifically reads:

**Honourable female politicians, do not give up your mandates as voters have faith in you, by voting in your favour.**

It is also unacceptable for the public when the waiving of mandates is due to party persuasion or request. For this reason we are appealing to the leadership of the parties:

**Do not suggest to women included in the party’s pre-electoral lists that they give up their mandates, because the public wants to see the politicians they voted for in the National Assembly.**

We are appealing to voters and organizations of RA.

Join us by signing this petition here:

<http://www.cspn.am/>  
<http://womennet.am/>

**Water supply issue**

**Women living in Yeraskh know the price for the water**



Yeraskh is a bordering village in Ararat region, which for years struggled to resist the enemy's attacks. For years the village survived without basic living conditions, deprived of natural life-giving potable water. "Having water or seeing the water machine in the village used to be happiness to us" said the peasant women.

"A bucketful of water was to be sold by 30 drams and sometimes a limit of 2-3 water buckets per family was being imposed in the village. This was being done to suffice at least minimal quantity of water to the whole village per visit of the water machine. Water for us was a kind of a "saint relic" and a glass of water poured in vain was a great loss for us".

Sanitary conditions became unbearable due to the absence of water and widely spread malaria during those years took lives of more than 18 village residents. Long-cherished and unrealistic dream of having water became a reality in 2010 in the frameworks of water supply and sewerage system program by Asian Development Bank (ADB). The interviewed people describe this program as a miracle.

"I can't transfer the feelings when we opened the faucet and saw the running water. My kids have seen nothing of a kind. Having water in the house, drinking pure and cold water was just a miracle for us", tell the villagers with a smile on their faces.

It is already two years the village is provided with 24 hour potable water. "People easily get accustomed to good conditions and now having no water for an hour creates lots of problems for the households. A lot of noise and worries rise when the water system gets damaged" says the village municipality employee Nvard Hovhannisyan. In fact, lack of water creates troubles for housekeepers especially this is why women were active in expressing their words of gratitude to the charitable organization who solved the long-lasting and disturbing water issue for them. Still, the village faces another issue:

"Our village used to have its water engineer who was responsi-

ble to fix the problems. Now the "Hayjrmoukh" (Armenian Water Sewerage Company) engineer based in Vayk city has to visit the village and eliminate the problem, which sometimes event takes days. Even minor problems such as damage of water meter or the pipeline should be fixed by this engineer who might be able to visit the village days after the problem occurs. Years ago, when the village mayor was in charge of the water supply, the local engineer was responsible for all troubleshooting, no problem was being delayed and minor issues didn't create major disturbances," said the women.

*Ninel Hovhannisyan*

**Meantime**

**Women and the Right to Water**

Empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication was the key topic for the 56th Session of UN Commission on the Status of Women, which was held on February 27- March 9, 2012 in New York City. A special panel discussion on "Empowerment of rural women resulting from access to water" consists of four inter-related elements:

**Socio-cultural empowerment:** Access to proper water and sanitation, and the recognition of women as farmers, will enhance their self image, called empowerment.

**Political empowerment:** if rural women, including women farmers, have leadership position in local government and in water users groups in which they can influence the decision-making related to water,

**Physical empowerment:** carrying water is an enormous burden which takes much energy and time of women and girls in rural areas.

**Economic empowerment:** enough water, both for agriculture and for local enterprises, will enable rural women to improve their economic position and that of their families.

**The road leading to welfare**

**Hey, road, take me to Bourastan ...**

Bourastan is a name of a village, literally- garden in bloom... "The road was of vital importance for our village. In order to get to the regional center, we were supposed to bypass three villages. Besides the loss of time, the cars were getting damaged on the dilapidated roads. Due to the new road our village experienced a great progress. Nowadays transporting the harvest is easy and most importantly, children go to school by this nice road. Before the renovation the problem was even tougher during winter times", tell Bourastan village residents and at the same time happily mention that the issue is already solved and left behind.

The Bourastan road renovation works began in 2009 within Asian Development Bank rural road construction program. The road was to connect the village with the regional center but as a result the entire road between Artashat highway and the railway station was entirely reconstructed. This is the road that serves and brings much benefit to Bourastan and five other neighboring villages.

**Thus, everything is possible**

"Our privatized agricultural lands are far from the village and during the summer season we have to go to the land several times a day. The dilapidated road created many challenges for us, the time was passing in vain on the roads and the cars were getting broken," tells Evelina Ghazaryan,



the Secretary of Bourastan village council.

Being the village resident and a state representative, Evelina deals these kinds of problems on daily basis. It is already 30 years Evelina is the Village Council Personnel Secretary and according to the co-villagers, she spends most of her time at the workplace. The peasants face diverse challenges starting from personal issues to completing the tasks assigned by the supervisor.

"There are moments that I think that my husband should have disallowed me work and these are the days that I feel really tired. But later if I stay home for a few days, I realize that I my life is impossible without work," adds Evelina with a smile.

Evelina is punctual at work and meantime manages the household perfectly. I asked her to share her secret with us. As a response she replied:

"Everything is possible. I gave birth to three children and never worked less than 8 hours a day. Years ago we managed the cattle farming, cultivated the land, the garden and sold the products with a great enthusiasm. Those days I used to sleep at 2 or 3 o'clock in



the morning, but now the conditions are refined and I have nothing to complain about".

Evelina is sure that she overcame the challenges due to her family support.

"My family members got used to the idea that I have to work. My husband and my kids assisted me greatly and the synergy of efforts helped us build our house."

Evelina's family posses 4 polyethylene vegetable greenhouses and recently planted a grape yard.

"Recently our life has improved greatly. In the old days there was no gas supply, we carried and watered the land by buckets. My husband and I built our house, created everything by ourselves and overcame the challenges together. I am happy for having a big family, three children, two daughters-in-law and mostly I am blissful for having grandchildren."

**Surely, Bourastan is loyal to its name**

Everyone knows her in the village – one needs to measure the blood pressure, the other needs an urgent injection, the third broke his arm, or the bee stung someone else ... in one word Aida is the first

aid provider in the village. She finds solution for everyone and she states she takes the burdens of others.

Aida Hovsepyan is the nurse of Bourastan health ambulatory for years. The advantages of the renovated road immediately impacted Aida's work and now she can easily arrange transportation of urgent cases to the regional hospital. Aida graduated from high education and started her career at Yerevan hospital # 1. After 6 years of employment at the hospital she got married and moved to live in Bourastan.

"Although my mother received no professional education, still she was assisting and healing people by traditional medicine and herbs."

Aida inherited the great love towards flowers from her mother.

"I remember my childhood and my paternal house at Mkhchyan village where we had a greenhouse of flowers. Here in Bourastan we decided to build a carnation

The Asian Development Bank improved lives of over 170 thousand people under its rural road renovation program. More than 600 thousand people benefited within water supply and sewage system programs by ADB.

greenhouse." The family started with one greenhouse and now they own four. Bourastan is faithful to its name even during winter season. Red and white beautiful carnations and yet to bud tulips in Aida's greenhouse, and it feels like in the real garden in bloom.

*Lilit Kocharyan*



The special edition is prepared by OXFAM Great Britain, Armenian branch and the Asian Development Bank.

Editor: Tamara Hovnatanyan E-mail: promediagender\_arm@yahoo.com