

## Facts

### Agriculture with a woman's face

Around 45% of the human manpower in Armenia i.e. around 500,000 individuals are employed in the agricultural sector; of these 57.1% are women.



Moreover, 31% of the structure of the employment of men falls to agriculture while it is 44% of the structure of employed men. In the structure of informal employment, 87% of those employed are in agriculture. In other words, women are more than important participants in agricultural development.

### Women in Local Governance



Of the 866 rural communities in the republic, only 20 are led by women (2,3%). The highest number of female village heads is in the Lori marz; seven of the 106 village communities are led by women; there are no women village heads in the marzes of Vayots Dzor and Aragatsotn.

Women comprise 9.5% of the composition of the village council. The highest number of women in the composition of village councils (20,3%) is in the Syunik marz; here there are two communities, Khdrants and Njeh, where the council is comprised of only women, but the village head is a man. The fewest women included in councils are in the marzes of Aragatsotn (5.1%) and Vayots Dzor (3.1%).

Only the village of Gomk in Vayots Dzor has 5 women council members.

Overall, women are not included in the composition of almost 42% of village councils in the republic.

### Food Female - 2013



It is already 3 years now that Oxfam and the Armenian Young Women's Association (AYWA) are trying to raise the role of women in the agricultural sector by organising a competition to discover and encourage female food heroes.

"We have discovered twenty food heroes in three years who have benefited not only their families by their activities, but also the development of agriculture; and they need encouragement", says Lilit Asatryan, the president of AYWA.

# Woman & politics

From economic success to political activity

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In the past three years 18 cooperatives were established in rural communities with the support of Oxfam in the marzes of Tavush and Vayots Dzor; 6 of them are women's agricultural cooperatives while the rest are equally comprised of women and men. It is noteworthy that through cooperatives Oxfam tries to introduce the social enterprise model, thus not only supporting the cooperative members, but also the whole community.

## Women's agricultural cooperatives

**"More confident and appreciated, more certain in their decisions..."**

**What guarantees success for women's agricultural cooperatives? The harvest festival held in the village of Gomk in Vayots Dzor was a good opportunity to reflect on this question. More than 100 representatives of 6 Oxfam beneficiary women's cooperatives participated in the agricultural products fair in the marz.**

The consumer cooperative of Gomk was established last year at the initiative of a group of active women in the village. They had applied themselves to the task with unprecedented enthusiasm and at the end of September this year they reaped the first harvest - beans and cucumbers - of their greenhouses which they proudly showed in the agricultural fair organised in the village.

As the members of the cooperative pointed out to us during our chat, they will collect the incomes and then decide in the future as to how to dispose of those sums. They said that a part of the income would be directed towards the maintenance and development of the greenhouses. They are also planning to support the new kindergarten in the village. In other words, the

social enterprise model encouraged by Oxfam will be implemented, where the greenhouse or refrigerating economies established with its support not only bring an income for the cooperative members and their families but also help the whole community because part of the income is directed towards the solution of the given community's social issues.

In our conversation about Oxfam's Livelihoods program, Margarita Hakobyan, the country director of the Armenia office, stressed that one of the main objectives of the program is the eradication of poverty and also the establishment of social justice. On that principle, the far-flung, border villages of the Vayots Dzor and Tavush marzes have been targeted by the program.

"Poverty is much higher in those villages and this is where the necessity for our support is much greater, especially for the small holder farmers who have neither financial resources nor receive any targeted assistance from the government. Our aim is to assist them by creating a model of cooperatives which of course is in harmony with the RoA Ministry of Agriculture policy", said M.Hakobyan explaining that although the government had adopted a policy of promoting cooperatives, nevertheless their mechanisms have not yet been formed.

"The classic model of a cooperative is being introduced on our part. This benefits the increase in the income of small holder farmers and the development of rural communities at the same time. Creating this model, our intention is not to cover the whole of Armenia with cooperatives and replace the government. Our aim is to show the efficiency of the model and by advocating that, promote

that it be included in the government policy and be replicated in other communities", she explained.

And how was the idea of establishing women cooperatives born? In response to this question Margarita Hakobyan noted that the factor of men migrating for work played a role in the base of this idea, even though the primary issue was the problem of the efficient use of women's potential.

"The outlying villages are being abandoned; women, naturally, are forced to follow their husbands who have left. We are trying to alleviate the problem of migration, by tying women to the village, involving them in economic activities. For that reason we decided that together with establishing mixed cooperatives, we should establish women's cooperatives. Our aim was to encourage women, raise self-confidence, and increase economic opportunities for women," she says.

## Media Award for journalists in the marzes

**"Women's Rights in Armenia: De Jure and De Facto."**

Oxfam in Armenia declares a competition of media pieces by journalists in the marzes entitled "Women's Rights in Armenia: De Jure and De Facto."

Materials for the competition can be presented by employees of print, online and broadcasting news media, free-lance journalists, civic activists, public correspondents and bloggers.

Materials must be printed, broadcast or uploaded to the internet from March 1st 2013 to

March 1st 2014, must cover the political, public, economic activities of women living in towns and rural communities in the marzes, their achievements and advances and any chosen problems and obstacles pertaining to the realisation of women's rights.



The best works will receive awards. The deadline for presenting materials is March 1st 2014.

For more information on the competition, see: <https://www.facebook.com/Oxfam.Armenia>



Key to success

**"Let us turn our village into a little Switzerland"**



"Today we have jobs, can grow different crops, and have established greenhouses and sun-drying facilities and we want to develop and produce excellent greenhouse crops in our small communities and turn our village into a little Switzerland," says Nune Avagyan, the president of the "Vankadzor" women's consumer cooperative in Gomk community in Vayots Dzor marz adding that because of employment many forget about leaving their homeland.

"Our cooperative is comprised of 37 women. It was set up thanks to Oxfam and acted as a stimulus so that we can operate, think and work...."

The "Vankadzor" cooperative women have sown, cultivated and preserved very nutritious non-traditional crops such as cherry tomatoes and broccoli. At present they are getting ready to enlarge the land, increase the yield and introduce it into the market and also to acquire fertilisers from the profits of the harvest in order to increase the yield, and to engage in the production of dried fruits.

This year Nune Avagyan was also elected to the village council.

"I think that it is time for women to also have their say. When you see the short comings and problems, you have to raise your voice about them and this is a good platform. After all, a man understands his concerns and a woman understands hers; only together can a result be achieved. The community has problems but there are no impossible, irresolvable problems and we must understand that we are the solvers of those issues."

Change with us

From economic success to political activity

The experience of women's agricultural cooperatives shows that there is a desire amongst the women farmers that, apart from economic successes, they would like to be involved in the decisions taken concerning the village. Moreover, not only are they now actively participating in the elections for the local self-governing bodies, but they are also winning. For example, in Gomk, 3 of the 5 members of the council are women and all three are members of the cooperative created by Oxfam.

**"There are two men in the village council and they are difficult to persuade"**

The women of the Gomk cooperative told us during our conversation, "It has not taken much effort from us to occupy an important place in the life of the community. We were not forced to overcome diverse obstacles to prove that our place is not only in the kitchen", pointing out that their village was populated with refugees from Azerbaijan and is not a traditional village where women's rights are limited and taboos are put on women's activities. According to them, this fact played no less a role in their economic-political progress ...

"We have always been free and active; this is not a traditional village – people residing here migrated from different places, a sort of city people. Many of us are refugees. That's why there is no such thing as, for example in the neighboring village, where her mother-in-law, father-in-law or the husband won't let her do anything. When they come here from that village and see us, they ask, "Where are these women going? On the streets all day, where are they going?" says Nune Sakunts, a member of the village council and the cooperative.

As she says, she has not come across any discrimination as a woman either in the village or in the family. Apart from the majority of the council being women, until recently the village head had been a woman. Moreover, she was elected to that post twice. So it seems that male-female relationships in this village really are on the same level in this village and being a woman is not identified with being unreliable and



incapable. On the contrary the men of Gomk are more passive.

"There are two men on the council, and we had trouble persuading them to nominate themselves. More women wanted to be nominated but there are external issues which men resolve; let's say water doesn't reach the village. Women can't go and work on that issue," continued Nune Sakunts.

**"We have to do that - move forward"**

As far as the surprised reactions of the residents of the neighbouring villages are concerned, then according to the Gomk council members, there are occasions when their example is contagious. "There are men amongst them who say, "Why are our women not active as well, we want them to be that active. It's just there are

some 'buts'... Well we say, begin to remove those 'buts' yourselves, you have to set an example." The women members of the Gomk council call for the courage to change the stereotypical lifestyle.

In Azatek, another village in Vayots Dzor the members of the cooperative seem to be ready to respond to that call. "The fact that there are no women members on our council limits women's rights. Women should also participate in the management of the village. At the next council elections we plan to nominate council members from the cooperative. We have to do that so that we become members of the council and move forward. We also have nominees from the women of our cooperative for village head, why not? I think we will come across obstacles on that path. It's natural. But it's us who should overcome them," says Susan Yeghoyan, a member of the Azatek cooperative.

Innovation

"Much has changed in my and my family's life"

The culture of social enterprise being introduced by Oxfam is new in Armenia but is more than topical. Apart from being able to resolve community issues this model reduces the social vulnerability of the rural communities to risks arising from climate change effects, including the damage caused virtually every year by hail. Within the framework of this objective, with support from Oxfam, 3 greenhouses covering an area of 900 sq.m. have been built in the Aknaghbyur village in Tavush marz, with a farmer's school adjacent to them and a social enterprise has been formed.

As Vadim Uzunyan, the Agriculture Food Security Program Officer in Oxfam has been working for a long time in Tavush marz promoting pro-poor Agriculture policy development and contributing to small holder farmers' economy scale up through establishment of agri-cooperatives and community social enterprise strengthening of smallholders' position in the horticulture value chain. One of the objectives is disaster and agricultural risk reduction in poorly resourced communities. The creation of greenhouse economies falls within the framework of this objective.

"The most important feature of this project is the idea of a social enterprise. This means that up to 40% of the profit arising from the operation of the enterprise is

directed towards the resolution of the problems and needs of the village. We think this will also become a precedent for other communities," says Uzunyan.

He also pointed out that new technologies had been introduced into the greenhouses.

"Drip irrigation and infra-red heating systems (OK) are in place as well as new, more resistant crops. This allows for alternative income to be made and alleviates the effects of the climate on crops."

We had the chance of becoming more acquainted with the work being done more closely in one of the greenhouses in Aknaghbyur.

"We grow two new types of tomatoes, one very sweet, one a little tart. We have a good yield. We work here each day in shifts, to water and weed. We are all in agreement that, together with our own vegetable plots, we will work here in parallel and strive to get a result", says Gayane Petrosyan, one of the residents of Aknaghbyur, showing us the already ripening tomatoes. We recognised her from the "Female Food Hero" awards. She was one of the winners of the competition. She has her own large farm with orchards of figs, and peaches, and corn fields but joined the Oxfam initiative with pleasure and today is one of the 45 members of the social enterprise.

The farm school established in the village, thanks to Oxfam, aims to build the capacity of small



holder farmers, including the skills of women farmers in the areas of production of vegetable plot crops and the reproduction of shoots and seeds for future sale. The "BSC" Business Support Centre conducts trainings on management, accountability for the members of the cooperative and also assistance is offered for the consumption of crops. A seedling greenhouse has been established by cooperation with the Scientific Centre of Vegetables and Industrial Crops in order for the community to grow its own seedlings.

Let us also point out that apart from setting up greenhouses, within the framework of the Livelihood programme, interest-free loans are provided to farmers.

The women we talked to are all enthusiastic about new prospects. It is well known that the principles of gender justice are upheld in Oxfam initiatives so that men and women can use the economic resources of the organisation equally; but in the case of greenhouse economies, it is the women who are in the front line.

Larisa has been a resident of Aknaghbyur for over 48 years

now. She confesses that she comes to the greenhouse and participates in the work every day with great pleasure.

"I have good apple and fig trees at home but I also take part in the work here. It is a good team, like a family; it is interesting when we work together as a group," noted Larisa Yeganyan, adding that she would like the social program to be directed towards solving the issues of the community road, night lighting or irrigation water.

The installation of an anti-hail station is an important issue for Emma.

"There have been occasions including this last year when the hail has damaged our yield and now that we have the greenhouse we are more at ease. We grow tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, peppers, aubergines in the three greenhouses. For example, until now we were creating saplings from 3 beans and here we learnt that the correct way is to plant just one seed. We have reaped a much better yield."

Alvard is also an active member of the cooperative.

"I have been here from the first day of its establishment. A great deal has changed in my family thanks to Oxfam. Today I have my own greenhouses and plant onions and herbs in the winter and cucumbers and tomatoes in the summer. These new greenhouses are a great help for Aknaghbyur...."

Expert point of view

“The decisions are made by my father-in-law but the remote control to my father-in-law is in my mother-in-law’s pocket”

Women spend five times more time on house work than men. Moreover in the rural regions more time is spent on household care and family than in the city. Data on time assessment from the Armenian Statistical Agency attests to this. Women in rural areas are busy from 06:00 a.m. to 23.00 p.m. but nevertheless 70% of them consider that the work has been correctly allocated in the family. This observation was made by expert Natalya Martirosyan, based on the results of a study of 6 communities in the Vayots Dzor and Tavush marzes. The aim of the study was to examine domestic relationships in the family, the decision making and managing of the family budget process and identify those factors which impede or benefit women’s activeness in community life.

“We noticed something interesting. Women’s cooperatives are much more beneficial for encouraging women’s progress, and leadership. Men lead mixed cooperatives and even when there are also women amongst the cooperative members, they do not have a decisive voice and perform administrative tasks. In other words, they find themselves in uneven conditions with men.

However, women progress significantly within women’s agricultural cooperatives. Women confess that apart from the financial aspect, the cooperative has given them team work skills, and boosted personal growth. One of the women also confessed that after she became a member of the cooperative, her voice in the family began to be heard as they saw the benefit to the family budget coming from her work.

“In a word, are women’s cooperatives more advantageous for women?”

“That’s how it works. Although I am not a feminist, I think that as an initial step we should develop and support the creation of women’s formal and non-formal unions. It can be in the form of a cooperative, club or community centre. There is also a widespread opinion that women cannot work together, while these cooperatives show the opposite – women collaborate and support each other and when necessary, stand in for each other. It is here that as well as formal leaders, informal leaders emerge.”

“What is impeding women being successful?”

“There are objective and subjective factors. Objectively women are very busy with their daily work and it is not always that there are supporting institutions - kindergarten or full-day care – where children can spend their time after school. The second issue is the fact that they are financially not

independent. Very few women have any property in their name, and if a difficult situation arises, women become vulnerable; for example, they cannot get a loan.....

And the greatest obstacle of course is public opinion, which accepts a model where the man handles life outside. That is a model which does not correspond to today’s reality. There were young women who said that public opinion does not encourage their growth or foster active women.”

“When you are earning money and you take it home it is difficult for your opinion not to be taken into account,” Zedea village

“The public opinion is that it is shameful when a man does a woman’s job, however when it is the opposite, that is, a woman does a man’s job, everything’s fine, no longer shameful ...” Haghtanak village

“How does a man know what clothes the children needs or that there is no coffee in the house? I decide all these things. Why should I ask him about that?” Azatek village

“My husband knows better with whom to talk and whose goods to sell. He has old acquaintances, and ties. If I try to find such ties, people would not take me seriously.” Gomk village

“If you want to do work other than housework, you really have to exert a great deal of energy because you have to get both done and so your problem is how to do that.” Zedea village

“I neither have the time for nor am interested in politics. My husband was a member of the party during the soviet period and now my son is a member of a political party. So let them get on with their politics.” Gomk village

“In other words, there are taboos for village women?”

“They have more of a virtual nature now. It is the same as 10 years ago when if we saw a woman driver, it seemed to be a taboo; however, today it’s not like that. Taboos disappear when life dictates it and mechanisms promoting women are put in place by the state and society.

In other words, the question of whether or not a woman can become a member of the council is not discussed any more if there

is a positive experience and people see that, by participating in community life, women bring resolutions to social and educational issues.”

“What changes have you noticed within the families, from the point of view of decision-making?”

“Today many women perform the role of a home bank; they regulate the daily expenses. They do not say that women are the managers of poverty, in vain. However when it concerns large expenses

or investments, here the man decides; women are careful and don’t take any risks. Although the majority of the women asked, pointed out that family decisions were taken together, when you ask what happens when there is a disagreement, they answer that the last word belongs to the man.

Another interesting thing was also said, “It’s true, the decisions are made by my father-in-law but the remote control to my father-in-law is in my mother-in-law’s pocket.”

“What is the key to the success of village women?”

“The key to women’s success is not in the hands of men; it is in the hands of women themselves. It’s just that I think it mustn’t be done confrontationally. It must be achieved step by step; it’s not possible all at once. It must be shown that women help their families by working or being involved in civil activism, and the children do not suffer because of it.

For example, take the example of Nune, the president of the Gomk cooperative. She has three children, is a teacher, has a wonderful family, is an active citizen and a member of the council; other than gaining, has her family lost anything?”

“How are successful women in the village treated?”

“Women say that they are treated well, they are not blatantly labelled. There are some women who have been presidents of the cooperative and then have become council members. And that is an official raise in status. Those women have been elected by the community; that is, they are acceptable to the community...”

“In other words, in this case, economic activity brings political empowerment?”

“Yes. We have examples of that but we must talk about and explain that positive experience, the successful examples. The stereotypical approach can only be overcome with the help of precedents, and positive examples; particularly since they are very few women in the political arena. Our research showed that in general women are not interested in participating in political life. Some of them say that it is not a job for women. The others understand political participation as becoming members of political parties, adding that they do not believe them because the parties only remember them at election time. At the same time, women are passive and at the community level few know how the community budget is formed, how it is spent, and what opportunities the council has to improve community life...”

Women’s voice



When our greenhouse was created, I was there to the early hour of the morning. I tended to the plants as if they were children, and regulated the temperature. The tomatoes and cucumbers I have grown and, why not, the preserves I have made, already have regular buyers on the market. We feel a new breath each day in the cooperative: new types of produce and new sales. The difficulties are behind us and as a result, I feel like a new farmer who still has things to do such as increase my income, establish new products and disseminate my experience.

Sylva Arakelyan, farmer, Ptghavan community, Headmistress of the village kindergarten

Initially when the current head of the village proposed my nomination, and the party upheld it, certain circles, not being able to criticise my work said, ‘she is a woman, being village head is a man’s job, how is she going to work? Why, isn’t there a man in the village that we need to have a woman as village head?’ But the men in the village said, ‘A lion is a lion, whether it’s male or female.’

Nvard Hovhannisyán, Candidate for Yeraskh village head

It is vital that the family must support the woman in order for her to become established. In politics and civic activities, if you do not have strong support you cannot overcome the difficulties and you can’t help others. My husband supports me on everything, advises me, sometimes gets more enthusiastic than I do about this or that during the planning phase and gets much more excited when that problem is resolved.

Armine Arsenyan, Jermuk council member



Where should a woman with potential present herself? An environment should be created so that she can manifest herself, so that the residents can see that she is a leader and can become a council member and them, why not, also village head. The council is the start and public discussions are the environment in which women must show themselves, the public will see and gauge them and they can establish themselves.

Ruzanna Ghazaryan, President, “Ashkhatank yev hayrenik” NGO

We had a painter, Koshtants Garnik, who said that whoever had brains, died; whoever had money, moved away; and whoever was helpless, stayed. But I wouldn’t say that we are helpless; we have stayed on our land which is the aim of patriotism in our hearts our souls.

Nina Adamyán, President, “Sose” Mother’s Association

Men’s opinion

“The women in the village work day and night, and the ones in the cities?...”

Very few leave the border village of Nerkin Karmiraghbyur in the Tavush marz for work abroad because, as the villagers say, the danger in the village is great, the sound of shots being fired is constant, and men cannot leave their families to the whims of chance.

Here wife and husband are both soldiers. The majority of men protect the border and the women look after the cares of the home, and they do everything so that the men can go to the border with an easy mind. Walking around the village we decided to ask the men if the difference between village women and town women is great.”

“You’re asking a difficult question. I cannot say who is good, who is bad but I can say that the village woman works day and night. She wakes up at 5 or 6 in the morning, milks the cow, on the land, cultivates something and has no rest till evening. The town women wake up in the morning, have coffee, gossip at little about the neighbours, go to work, come back, then go out to the shops and come home,” said a 60 year-old resident of Karmiraghbyur while chatting with us.



Thirty-year old Karen has recently got married. He said that wherever he went to ask for a girl’s hand in marriage, they refused to do so saying, “We don’t have a daughter to send to the edge of the fire.”

“I even went to find a girl from Berd –again they refused, giving the same reason. They also say, ‘Our daughter go to the village, to do what?’ relates Karen and adds with a smile, “as if Berd is a town and our village is just a village...eh.”

Karen’s wife is from Byureghavan, but she

is the granddaughter of a villager. Karen says, “I don’t want to insult anyone but there is something strange about city girls... Even from the point of view of work is concerned, a city girl will not come here and suffer. My wife has already adapted to these conditions and says that if there were no shooting here, there would be no better pace than here but it’s not everyone who will come here to live and you can’t blame anyone.”

60 year old Sahak is surprised as to why we are asking him that question. “In the village, particularly in this village a woman, apart from cultivating the fields and orchards, is a soldier on a par with her husband. We live in an area where children from the age of five grow up as soldiers, let alone women...Isn’t it obvious that I am going to praise the long-suffering women of our village?” says Sahak, laughing.

Another man joins our conversation and bluntly says, “Come on, can you even say, ‘you have an eyebrow above your eye’ to a city woman?....” She’ll say, ‘It’s my right. It’s my... I don’t know what...’. While our women, heads down, work all day shoulder to shoulder with their men. So there, dear girl...”



**Mission**

**Breadmaker Manush has also received an invitation from London**

"Manush, hey Manush, have you got any fresh bread? We're sending it to a soldier. Oh dear Manush will you give us a few lavashes? We are taking it to hospital. My daughter says, 'I want some of aunt Manush's bread'."  
 In the village of Janfide in Armavir marz, they call Manush Yeghishyan, bread maker Manush. She always has fresh bread at home. She says that apart from the set price, the owner of the bread gives the breadmaker 10 lavashes and she bakes almost every day; she has over 80 customers.



would buy her a computer and make the work easier.

"In the beginning I learned how to bake bread in order to be able to give my children bread and then I began to like my work. However wealthy I get, I will not stop baking bread because apart from being a way of making money, baking bread has an important meaning for me which is that I acquire a circle of friends, companionship and respect and honor," says Manush, adding "This work is a specialisation and I am insulted that there is a Teachers' Day, Army Day, and Victory Day but there is no Bread makers' Day. What are our MPs thinking? Let them draft such a law... the bread maker is no less an important person. Can you imagine what would happen if there were no bread makers?"

Manush jokes that if there were a festival for bread makers it's possible that the villagers

"Now people come to our home on foot to say what day they want to bake bread. In that case I could speak to them and take their orders on the computer. I would also know the upcoming weather; whether or not it is favourable for baking," she adds, smiling.

The female bread maker is very proud of her job. She says, "The important thing is that I help support my family, don't take out loans, and don't buy food on the slate from the shops. I am a dignified person; I'm not going to beg from others,"...No one in Manush's family has a permanent job. Manush bakes bread and her son catches fish and sells them. "My eldest son doesn't want me to bake bread. He says, 'you've done enough mum'." Manush bakes a sack of flour for 2-3 thousand drams. She does not upset any of her customers; she knows

whose order she has taken and when. They all know when and after whom their turn is to bake their bread.

Usually every home bakes bread once every 20 days and Manush has already calculated when each family's bread will finish. "It is a little difficult in winter; the days are short and I only manage to bake two sacks full. In summer it's a little more," says Manush and adds with a proud smile on her face, "There are many bakers in the village but many prefer me. If I am sick or busy one day, my customers postpone the bread making."

They have even offered to film Manush. She has also been invited to London but is still thinking about it because she can't come to an agreement with her husband and son.

"Things are different in a village. People here are more jealous. No man will allow his wife to go far away by herself," she says.

She had also received another attractive offer. At first she had felt good about it. Then she thought long and hard about it and understood that she would stay in the village, bake bread and not leave the country.

"One of my clients invited me to an exhibition-sale in Baghramyan. There were foreigners there who ate my bread. A few days later an expensive car stopped at our house. I saw it was them. They invited me to go abroad to bake bread. They told me I would earn more money, but I did not go...I do not want to leave; I want to stay here."

**Challenges**

**The families of migrant workers: Shaky matriarchy**

"Her man goes to Russia; finds a mistress and has a child. They tell him that his wife has a lover here. He comes back and kicks his wife and four children out saying, 'Go on, get out of my house; the kids are going to be like you.' He just needs that opportunity. How can you tell if it's a lie or the truth? Until you've seen it, your mouth shouldn't say it". This is the most talked about theme in Khor Virap about one of their own female villagers. Now when they do not go out into the field, they have time to sit and chat. I also take advantage of this opportunity to chat to them.

Women generally refuse to speak or be photographed. However after socialising with them a little the most courageous of them agree to be photographed and begin to open up.

"My day starts at six. I go to the field to work. I come home at six at night. Then I go to work in our home orchard. Then I make sure that the home is clean, and the children are not hungry...and so on, every day," says Tamara.

She receives 3-4 thousand drams for working 12 hours a day in the field. The heavy village work and overtiredness have nevertheless left their mark. Despite being fairly young at 37, Tamara has already been operated twice for gynaecological problems. "What can I do? Look, the women in the village do not have a normal everyday life anyway. Our health condition is not very good. We work for most of the day. It is terribly expensive to see a doctor and get a consultation. Operations are so expensive that when you have been operated on and should recuperate, you don't have time or money for that. I was operated on and then could not look after myself well and so I had to be operated on again. If only operations or tests could be a little different for us... Do those people not worry how the women in this village go to the doctor?" complained Tamara.

Tamara has three sons, one 11 year-old and two who are soldiers serving in the army. She shares both the worries and work of the

home equally with her husband; otherwise they could not get it done. Saro, her husband, is only home for three months of the year. It is seven years now that he has been a migrant worker while his wife stays at home, to look after the household. Tamara says she is used to it already and is not jealous.

Women's reign is dominant in the village for almost nine months of the year. The majority of the men in the village leave to work in Russia. The women remain in the village and the relative reign of the women begins.

They remain, but the dominant position of the man in the family is unwavering. Yes all the family worries such as finding the money, bringing up the children, and managing the household fall of the wife's shoulders, but the final word and decision belongs to the man.

"Ye it's not fair, but that's how it is. The final word belongs to men, the women - to women..." says Tamara. But they were not the ones to decide the rules. "That's how it is everywhere, adds Sveta, "And this order is not only from us. Great people have also lived by this rule."

"We work equally hard with our men but our worries are greater; just that of the home is enough," says Sveta. If the men of the village don't leave for migrant work, then they will simply be condemned to starve. In order to work on the land, they need investments and money.

"Water is supplied every other day and for only two hours at



that. If they have a pump, they fill the water up. If they don't they have to go here and there carrying water. In other words, the villager can't just work on the land, he has to go and work for someone else for miserable amount of money," says Sveta.

The girls of the village usually marry after finishing school and boys marry and then leave for migrant work. On the whole they do not even think about further education. "The public transport does not function well, you need money for the kids' education and that's not an easy thing. Even if your child has to go to the neighbouring village, you would have to leave everything and take him and bring him back; his father would not allow him to go and come alone. No, he won't study," says Anahit (her name has been changed). She refuses to be photographed and says that she's not looking good, but more likely she is scared: her husband will find out and get angry.

Her daughter, 17 year old Mary, has to have her father's permission to go anywhere. The father's authority will then be replaced by the husband's authority. "But of course, if she won't lis-

ten to her father now, how is she going to listen to her husband?" say the women.

Mary does not even think about further education. So she studies, where is she going to work after that? There are no jobs in the village, so why should she study? She also refuses to be photographed.

"Our girls are honourable. They wisely wed and become good mothers of good families. They are obedient, modest kids, good daughters-in-law...although I don't know if these kinds of practices and attitudes are good, or whether these women should also think just a little about themselves, live their own lives. But they don't have any time to think about that. By the time they think about it, they get married, and their men leave as migrant workers. Then suddenly you see that the man returns and turns his wife out of the house supposedly for not having any honor...I wonder what happened to that poor woman and her four children" says Sveta, thinking out loud. Then they start to discuss whether or not their fellow villager could have cheated on her husband or not....

**Key to success**

**Berd Bears: The Berd women's business card**



"You are helping to ease the concerns of the women from the border regions". It is already two years now that teddy bears with this message are being sold in different parts of the world.

The initiative is that of the "Berd women's resource centre" foundation. Today the Berd Bears or "Berd Bears" organisation has 30 female workers. Prior to beginning their work they have gone through specific training. Now the hand knitted bears are being sold online in numerous countries of the world.

"Berd Bears" are particularly widespread in the USA, Canada and Russia. The reason is not just the creative mind of the Armenian women and original ornamentation but also that they are made from ecologically clean materials.

"Berd women's resource centre" foundation was created in 2011. The mission of the organisation has benefited the consolidation of the women in the borderline region of Berd.

During our meeting, Anahit Badalyan, the centre's representative insists that the main problem in the region for women is the unemployment. At one time the region was well known for its numerous factories such as the relay, tobacco, preserves, textile, and wine factories. Almost 80% of the main manpower in these organisations were women; however, after the collapse of the Soviet regime the factories closed, women became unemployed and today, 23 years later the problem of women's employment has not been resolved.

Badalyan stresses that thousands of families in the region have a migrant member. The husband goes abroad and all household chores fall on the shoulders of the wife. What is sad is that women cannot find jobs hence a whole family waits for remittances from the migrant member in Russia to send. And if the husband forgets about his family, and starts a new life outside or cannot send any money, then the family finds itself in the clutches of poverty.



"Consequently if you ask me what the main direction for solving the issues of the region's women is, then I would say that firstly, we should find work for women and create conditions where they can show their potential and make something of themselves", says A. Badalyan, adding that such an opportunity was made possible for some two or three hundred of women by the "Berd Bears".

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**The numbers speak**

According to data of the Armenian Statistics Agency, households headed by women constitute 1/3 of all households. The fact that men leave as migrant workers accounts significantly for this

figure. It is not always that husbands keep in contact with the family left in Armenia. In rural communities 26% of households are headed by women. Moreover, not only are those households

significantly lower in income per capita (22.982 drams per month) than those led by men (43.030 drams per month) but they also generally have a lower standard of living than them.

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