

## Facts and Figures

October 15 is the International Day of Rural Women



This new international day was added to UN Calendar of Observances right after the General Assembly adopted its resolution 62/136 of 18 December 2007. The Resolution recognizes the critical role and contribution of rural women in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty.

In addition, the United Nations observes the World Food Day on 16 October and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October hence emphasizing the special role of rural women in food production and achieving food safety. This year too the enhancement of rights and opportunities of rural women are particularly accented, as a critical factor in achieving sustainable development goals.

### Recognition and valuing the role of rural women



37,1 % of workforce in Armenia are employed in the agricultural sector, 58,7 % of whom are women. This fact proves that women are very important players in agricultural development. Men constitute 28,7 % in the overall unemployment rate, women have taken up the 44,6 %. As a matter of fact, it is women who produce the major portion of agricultural production and serve as main guarantees for food provision and sustaining households in rural areas.

### Facts about hunger and women

- Women frequently die of hunger, but they are also key players in the fight against hunger. In developing countries 79 % of women engaged in economic activities are agricultural food producers.

- It is possible to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger by 100-150 million if more resources are allocated to women farmers.

- 60 % of women and girls live in malnutrition.

- 85-90 % of time spent by households worldwide to cook food falls within women's personal time.

- In critical situations women are the first to cut the quantity of food so that their families are able to consume food normally.

# Woman & politics

Special issue 2015

WomenNet.am

"Let us all ask, how safe is our food?"



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Photo credit: Oxfam

## Women's Agricultural Cooperatives

### "We are not scared to work"

All women presented in this newspaper issue are involved in agricultural cooperatives established within Oxfam's Economic Justice Program. Most of these women have already achieved success, the others are just starting full of hopes and expectations. For some work in the cooperative is the only source of income for the family to survive, for others an additional source to earn money again to feed the family. However, all these women are guided by the "we are not scared of work" principle, as an important pre-requisite for success.

As Margarita Hakobyan, Oxfam in Armenia Country Director notes, Oxfam has started to bring farmers together in cooperatives since 2010. Oxfam operates in regions of Tavush and Vayots Dzor and established 25 cooperatives where 54 % of members are women. Margarita Hakobyan says that many problems are addressed through the set-up of cooperatives: the idea of social enterprise is realized, loans are becoming more accessible which injects hope in

people and helps to reduce migration, especially in border communities.

One of the innovative approaches Oxfam introduced was the establishment of women's cooperatives. Currently 8 women's cooperatives operate in the regions of Tavush and Vayots Dzor.

"Oxfam's experience showed that women's cooperatives are very sustainable since women are more prone to come up with new initiatives, as well as are accountable and diligent. In managing

cooperatives they are guided by social justice principles in a more responsible way than men. Practices also prove that men managers propagate their power on other cooperative members and prioritize their own personal interests thus deprioritizing the key principles of social justice and accountability. I think that this cooperative model can become a viable and replicable model for many communities if significant efforts and resources are put to develop it (which also has a social mandate)," Margarita Hakobyan says. In her opinion, nowadays cooperatives are important not only for Oxfam, but the Government which elaborates and implements policies and strategies aimed at cooperative development.

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## Global Goals for Sustainable Development

On 25 September 2015 the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit adopted the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The 'five Ps'—people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership—capture the broad scope of this agenda.



The document entitled "Transforming our world: the 2015 Agenda for Sustainable Development" reiterates in its preamble the following: "We are resolved to free the human race within this generation from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet for the present and for future generations.... As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind".

This Agenda agreed and adopted by 193 UN member states reflects 17 sustainable development goals. World Leaders have committed to achieve three extraordinary things in the next 15 years. **End extreme poverty. Fight inequality & injustice. Fix climate change.** The Global Goals for sustainable development could get these things done. In all countries. For all people.

The first five Goals are particularly ambitious.

### SDG 1: No Poverty

- By 2030, End poverty in all its forms everywhere

### SDG 2: Zero Hunger

- End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

### SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

- Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

### SDG 4: Quality Education

- Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning

### SDG 5: Gender Equality

- Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.



## Research

## Gaps in nutrition of the population of Armenia

"The Advanced Public Research Group" (APR Group) in partnership with Oxfam in Armenia conducted a research to identify the state and gaps of nutrition of the population of Armenia as well as efficiency of existing national policies and their implementation mechanisms. The study was conducted among 1600 households in 10 regions of Armenia and Yerevan.



The research is conducted within the framework of EU-funded "Improving Regional Food Security through National Strategies and Small Holder Production in the South Caucasus" project. The results of the study are preliminary and will be finalized in the upcoming month.

## About food and income

According to preliminary results of the study, 46,4 % of respondents said that there have been times in the past 12 months when their families experienced lack of food. This more frequently occurred in February (58,3%), March (68,5%) and April (57,6%). The vast majority of respondents (70%) noted that the average monthly income of their families was below 200,000 AMD. More specifically, the average monthly income of 29,6 % of families constituted approximately 100-200,000 AMD, 27 % earned around 54-100,000 AMD on average and 13,8 % of families reported an average monthly income of up to 54,000 AMD.

49 % of respondents said that compared to last year the amount spent on food increased; 26,1 % said that this amount was the same. These results are recorded in line with the facts that in the observed period income of 39,1% respondents decreased and 45,5% reported the same income.



The following responses were received to the "Do you ever borrow food with the condition to pay later?" question: 17,8% of respondents - almost always, 16,9% - very often, 18,8% - sometimes, 9,2% - seldom and 36,6% - never.

When describing the condition of their households 27,4% of respondents noted that they did not earn enough money even to buy enough food; 40,7% said that their income was sufficient only to buy food, not clothing; and only 23,6% of respondents mentioned that their income was sufficient both for food and clothing, but not for purchasing commodities for long-term use. Only 1,4% of respondents could afford buying household equipment and furniture and 0,3% said they could afford cars, apartments and so on.

## About sanitary conditions and food poisoning cases

86,4% of respondents noted that they washed hands eight and more times a day; 72,2% noted that they almost always used a soap while washing hands. In the meantime, only 69,6% of respondents have round-the-clock water supply in their houses. The 15,3% of respondents never have enough water to meet all the needs of their households related to water use.

2,3% of respondents drink water from tanks, 2,8% drink spring water, 1,6% drink water from the well, 2,56% prefer bottled water, 1,9% of respondents drink filtered tap water and 87,6% drink regular water from the tap.

The following answers were received to the "Have you ever got poisoned by food?" question: 89,2% - never; 6,6% - once every two-three years; and 3,4% - once or twice a year.

When asked the "what lessons learnt do you have after getting food poisoning?" question, 4,76% noted that they stopped eating certain types of food; 3,6% said they changed nothing in their meal plans, 0,3% started to read food labels more attentively, 0,3% stopped eating in certain places (for instance in restaurants and cafes), 0,1% changed the cooking recipes and ways and 0,1% of respondents stopped drinking water from the tap.

## Success Stories

## "We are not scared of work"

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When talking about women's cooperatives, Arthur Gomktsyan, Oxfam Economic Justice Program Officer notes that unlike mixed cooperatives (with men and women members) women's cooperatives are more organized and transparent and show great results. Mixed cooperatives quite often face two problems. "First, women mostly abstain from participating in decision making and not because they are forced by men to act so. It is their own decision conditioned by traditional way of thinking. And second, men are more practical and when they do not see the expected results very soon, they get disappointed," Arthur says.

Conversations with women cooperative members prove that cooperatives bring about significantly important changes in their lives and social status. They feel an increase in self-esteem, their opinions are recognized in their communities and they acquire a certain civil stance. Having gained a good reputation among village people these women attempt to participate and win in local government elections so that they can change something in villages. Besides, women mention that trainings and consultation provided by Oxfam and its partners - the "BSC" Business Support Center (BSC) and the Scientific Center for Vegetable and Industrial Crops (SCVIC) are important and solid knowledge base for them that will

sustain after the project is over. Projects help to introduce new modern technologies in the village thus increasing the effectiveness of food production and ensuring the organic quality of produced food.

"The cooperative is just the right institution that unites small-holder farmers around common problems and gives the opportunity to find mutually beneficial solutions to those problems. One of the most important pillars of a cooperative is the existence of good will and common interest, another one is the farmer's willingness to start a cooperation," Vadim Uzunyan, Oxfam Economic Justice Program Manager says. In his opinion, it looks like women get united and take joint decisions more easily.

## "The women's cooperative of our village breaks stereotypes"

"We could prove that women can not only be good wives and mothers, but also successful farmers that inspire many people and who follow our example", - says the Head of the Sarigyugh cooperative Luiza Revazyan.

Luiza graduated from school and university with honours and took up the job of computer science teacher in her village school. At present she prepares to apply for the position of school principal of her village. Luiza is an energetic and proactive woman, with innate leadership qualities. Unlike most women in the village Luiza drives a car which breaks the stereotypes of villagers about rural women's status and position in a rural community.

"I do not at all imagine myself without working and always strive to learn or start something new. I am convinced that one cannot achieve anything in life without hard work." - says Luiza.

In 2014, learning about the successfully functioning cooperative in the neighbouring village of Sevkar, Luiza contacted Oxfam representatives and asked for support in establishing a coopera-



tive in her village - Sarigyugh. As soon as Oxfam's support was secured, she convened women of the village and told them about the initiative. Many of these women liked the idea and, as a result, 15 of them now operate the Sarigyugh cooperative and cultivate high value vegetables.

"Women of our cooperative are more respected in the community and in their own families. In my family, for instance, my husband and my children, as well as the elderly relatives are proud of achievements of the cooperative and do their

best to support it. The cooperative's team has become a big family for us where we share hardships and happy moments. The trust of people is the biggest achievement we've gained."

Sarigyugh borders Azerbaijan. It was rather destroyed as a result of war, and even nowadays, there are shootings here.

"Life is not peaceful here but we have got used to it. We try to live with danger by ignoring it when we are busy. We found the work in cooperative as something important and necessary for us and if it succeeds, people will stay in the village, I think. The cooperative is a new undertaking for us. Trainings and consultation provided by Oxfam and its partners proved to be very useful, and we managed already to establish contact with other farmers via Internet and participate in online forums. This year we plan to grow 2-3 tons of tomatoes and really hope to sell the harvest quite profitably",

Says Luiza, mentioning that they were able to set up good relations with the community municipality, which considers their feedback, and supports them as best it can. We plan to provide support in solving issues our village faces.

## "I stepped into a new stage of life"

Before marriage Marine Manucharyan lived in Ijevan. She graduated from the Pedagogical Institute and worked as a teacher at a local school. She lives in Sarigyugh now, teaches in junior classes at the village school and is actively involved in the women's cooperative activities.

She says that life in village was at first rather hard for her, not only because she had never engaged in agricultural work, but also because she found herself in a patriarchal family.

"Here women are not allowed to do many things; taking independent decisions is not the practice; husbands usually decide what to do and when. For instance, we had cases in our cooperative when husbands did not even allow their wives to travel to Yerevan to participate in seminars. However, attitudes gradually change and hus-

bands understand that the work in the cooperative creates income and a certain level of prestige for the family. Thus, they do not forbid their wives to engage in the cooperative. I should say that life itself dictates new rules. Nowadays, when most men are forced to emigrate in search of employment, women take responsibility for the entire family and naturally become de facto leaders of it. My experience proves that women are no worse than men in that role and often exceed men in rationally managing households.

I stepped into a new stage of life when joined Oxfam's cooperative. In addition to opportunities to increase income and newly obtained skills to grow high value vegetables for the family, relations in my family improved and my husband started to consider my opinion, as well as take my advice. My co-villagers suggested several years ago that I should nominate my candidacy for the village mayor's post, but my husband was against it. Whereas now, when our cooperative is so successful, he would not mind, I think."



## "The feeling of hope these women have is of the utmost important value"

Gayane Amiryan is one of the active members of the cooperative of Aygehovit. She says that she is a happy woman - her family lives in peace and harmony, kids are in good health, and now they are starting a new venture - the agricultural cooperative. All preparatory work is finished. The greenhouse will soon be set up and they'll start planting vegetable seedlings.



"People in our border village are not rich and earning one's living is hard here. Few men remained in the village. Those who stayed are mainly elderly men. Young men leave for Russia to work and sometimes take families with them. My husband and I experienced that too: at first my husband travelled to Russia to find a job and then I joined him together with the children. A year later, however, we all came back to Armenia because we

could not settle down in a foreign country. To me, it was the right decision at that time. Family is the most important value for me. So, it's better to share a piece of bread at home, than be away from each other and ruin the family", - says Gayane Amiryan.

She says that last year, when they learned about Oxfam's possible support to establish a cooperative in their village, they thought that was just the chance. The news excited them, they talked to villagers, found supporters and people ready to engage, held a meeting, registered the cooperative, and started to work.

"Our cooperative is not a women's cooperative. But the only man in the cooperative is the head of the cooperative who was elected because of his significant managerial experience, open-mindedness, and fair character. He respects women. The other 9

members of the cooperative are women which is right, I think. Women are the main workforce in our village. So, it's them who should get support. They need to have income because lack of money causes many problems in families. Now women of our cooperative will hopefully have not very high though, but stable source of income. This will be women's own contribution into the family budget to strengthen family relations and help her to have her opinion taken into account in family decisions. But this factor is not probably the most important one. The feeling of hope these women have is the utmost important value. We started to believe in ourselves and knew that joint work would come to support both our families and the entire village community. If everything proceeds well, we plan to allocate the 10-15 per cent of income to the village kindergarten where 70 children attend."



## Success Stories

### “I joined the initiative without hesitation”



Joining new initiative of the cooperative recently established in Getahovit Seda Chagaryan sees an opportunity to have extra income for her family. She lived there all her life. She worked in the military Prosecutor's Office in Ijevan city for many years, but left the job due to the Office restructuring. Her husband is a former policeman and is retired now. Seda's family is large. All of them live in one house together – Seda, her husband, and her in-laws. She has two sons, two daughters-in-law and two grandchildren. The oldest member of her family is 80, the youngest is just 6 months old. Like many young men of the village, Seda's sons also work abroad – one in Kazakhstan, and the other in Russia. Seda's family is friendly and hard-working.

household is well-off to a certain extent – we breed cattle, make dairy products and hand them for sale in Ijevan shops. My elderly in-laws are mainly engaged in that, however due to old age they experience difficulties. Hence, I am forced to think of new ways how to earn additional income for my big family. Children are growing and the house is becoming too small to accommodate everyone. We dream of saving some money to build a new house for my eldest son.

We expect a lot from the cooperative's functioning. We are thinking of planting small quantities of vari-

ous vegetables first, and then follow which vegetables will yield good harvest, which vegetables will be sold most and what type of consumption markets exist. Marketing knowledge received during Oxfam trainings will, indeed, help us in sales. It would be great if we could purchase a refrigerator and a sun drier in the future. If planned and managed well, we can produce a lot. A lot of things depend on how we will distribute roles and responsibilities in the cooperative. We will do it just like it happens in a family – every person must engage in what-

ever he/she is good at. I will most probably deal with sales and marketing issues as I have certain sales experience gained from selling produce from my household. I am quite good at negotiating with clients and manage to sell our dairy products.

The cooperative has eleven members now. Nine are women. We all live in one neighborhood and trust each other. I am sure we will succeed because none of us is scared of work; we all use in our daily work the knowledge and skills gained during Oxfam trainings; and most importantly village municipality supports us.”

“When villagers learnt about the cooperative, many did not dare to join the initiative. But I signed up without hesitation. Our

### “You need to listen to people and be attentive to their needs”

Gyulvard Engibaryan is the eldest member of the cooperative established in Getahovit village – she is 70 and despite her age she is energetic and cheerful. She has grown tobacco in the collective farm (kolkhoz) for 27 years. Although retired now, she continues to help her family and bring up her grandchildren.



“I will work hard as long as I have energy and strength for that. I am willing to pass my experience and knowledge onto younger generation. When I learnt about the cooperative, my first thought was to definitely get involved. The initiative is new to younger generation, not to me – cooperatives have many similarities with Soviet time collective farms such as, for instance, the collective work of people. I believe that honesty and persistency in work will

lead to success. We are hopeful that work in the cooperative will increase income, as well as relations in the community will be strengthened. 11 families of our village will directly benefit from the cooperative's operation, another 10-15 in other target villages of Oxfam project. But still,

many other villages of Armenia are in need of support. I wonder what the Government is up to. Without Government programs and support people will leave villages, especially the youth. My two sons, for instance, still live in the village but do not have permanent jobs. Because of that they are eager to leave and I am hardly persuading them to stay. I attentively follow the developments in the country on TV and in local newspapers and get the impression that people's voices are nowhere heard and considered. That's not good. Probably half of the 2 millions of Armenia's population live in villages. If things are smartly arranged, life of people in villages can be easily improved. People can sustainably earn income if they get the first push. Oxfam's example must be replicated in many rural areas to bring change in poor people's lives.”

### Tasks are not labeled as ‘male’ and ‘female’

Anahit Veranyan is 52. She is a merchandiser by profession. After graduation she wanted to stay in Yerevan but could not. She returned to her native village and got a job in the local shop. She soon got married. Her family lived a hard life and faced both financial and health problems, however the family could overcome them due to persistence and optimism.

Anahit is an entrepreneur and owns two small shops in the village. Her income is, however, very low. Risks of running a shop in a village are high. People are poor and buy food products with the condition to pay later. Sometimes they do not pay back all the debts. This is why Anahit looks for new sources of income in the village.

“During the first community open meeting with village people we discussed the initiative further and decided to give it a try. A year has passed since then – now the cooperative is well established with 12 members (6 men and 6 women) who have made up a friendly team. Tasks are not labeled as ‘male’ and ‘female’: men in the team do weeding, planting and harvesting together with us. The community respects us and the municipality supports us. The vegetables and greens we grow are sold in the village at lower prices than in the market. We define special discounts for poor people. Our vegetables are relatively ecolog-

ically friendly as we use minimal amount of pesticides and use only bio-fertilizers. A lot of villagers are eager to join the cooperative if we decide to expand. This year we have already harvested 1 tons of tomatoes, 30-50 kg of pepper which brought us a total income of 230,000 – 250,000 Armenian drams. Our forecast is to collect at least another 2 tons of tomatoes during the next months of cultivation.”

Anahit says that she highly appreciates her husband's help in household chores when she is busy in the greenhouse.

“Apart from income I get great pleasure from working in the cooperative. My soul rests when I take care of plants in the greenhouse. In the morning I hurry to ‘meet’ my plants and ‘talk’ to them – they are like my children waiting for attention and care. Love and care are crucial for success. I feel happy with my work in the cooperative and its results”.



“Well, I think that being weak and fragile is a huge luxury for women. Women must be strong to overcome challenges of her family and village life. The cooperative empowers our women and strengthens both their economic and social status. Oxfam's support very much contributes into this. However, we would like the Government of Armenia to prioritize rural women and small entrepreneurship in rural areas that basically creates jobs for women”.

### “We feel that our life has significantly been changed”



Nelli Ordinyan – Head of Yenokavan cooperative has specializations in two areas: philology and management. Nelli has 22 years of experience in teaching and currently teaches Russian language and literature at the village school. Nelli's family is comprised of her husband, mother-in-law and two children and, though they do not consider themselves as poor, they need additional sources of income.

They have grown tomatoes, peppers and chilly peppers for the second year in a row in the cooperative established in the village.

“Life in a village rarely opens up opportunities to achieve new perspectives in a certain area of work. Given this chance, I immediately accepted the offer to join the cooperative. Most members of our cooperative are women who constitute a strong team. We know a lot depends on us in terms of results. The work in

the cooperative, indeed, takes most of our time but I manage it since most activities are implemented in summertime. My husband fully supports me by helping me around the house and doing homework with the kids. I think that other women members of the cooperative receive similar support from their husbands because these women's work significantly benefits their families. In general, I tend to think that these stereotypes are fading. Many people

have started to think that real life requires catching all possible opportunities to increase family income. Cooperative is one of such opportunities that provides for small, but sustainable income. I am happy to say that we feed the whole village with tomatoes. We have established good relationships with the village people and the municipality. We, in turn, plan to launch support to the village by co-funding the water pipeline construction.”

The stories were collected within the framework of the program “Improving Small Holder Farming through Agricultural Cooperatives and Value Chain Development in Tavush Marz, Armenia” implemented by Oxfam and its partners supported by BCS “Business Support Center” and the Scientific Center for Vegetable and Industrial Crops (CSVIC).

## A sign of Quality

### The labeling of Armenian organic food pictures three pomegranates

There are 340 thousand small-holder farmers in Armenia. 90 of them are not aware of organic food despite the fact that the development of organic agriculture has been recognized a priority and perspective direction in Armenia. Our conversation with Nune Darbinyan, the Founding Director of “Eco Globe” company, touched upon this and other important themes in the sector. “Eco Globe” company is engaged in the certification of organic food products in Armenia.



Nune Darbinyan defines what the description of organic food is: food produced in conditions that correspond to certain defined organic standards. The defined standards are strict: it is required to not only exclude the use of chemicals and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), but also introduce and apply energy and water saving technologies to increase the harvest. Any company engaged in organic agriculture must guarantee that its produce does not contain GMOs and the quantity of used additives is limited from the moment of purchasing raw material to storage of ready produce.

Although the organic agriculture has large development perspectives in Armenia, the progress is not satisfactory yet. As there is a high demand for organic agricultural produce in many countries, the Government support farmers in that.

Organic production should definitely be certified so that consumers are clear about the producer, the production conditions and places. The state and media play an important role in this matter. The consumers must trust products with ‘bio’, ‘eco’ and other similar labels only if organic certificate and the information about the certification institution is available on the label.

Three pomegranates are pictured on the label of Armenian organic production which should be identifiable to consumers. The state must undertake measures towards making this label accessible for everyone as the market is full of falsified food. The organic production label is also defined in the RA law on Organic Agriculture which, unfortunately, is not applied in due practice. Germany, for instance, spends large amounts of money on advertising labels, which has resulted in German consumers' behavior change of identifying the organic label during any shopping.

“Nowadays “Eco Globe” is the only certification institution present in South Caucasus region and CIS countries that gives organic food producers the opportunity to export their production to developed countries and to have it recognized in foreign markets. This will particularly help to boost the development of Armenian economy and agricultural sector. However, our operations will be an end in itself if consumers are not informed about certified organic production”, Nune Darbinyan says.



## Food Safety

## Who should be in charge of preventing food poisoning and what conclusions should be drawn?



This question is more than topical nowadays in the context of recent food poisoning cases reported in schools and kindergartens of Armenia. Let us mention that two state agencies – the State Service for Food Safety and the State Health Inspection Agency, are responsible for the prevention of food poisoning.

evant state institutions that control the activities of these persons/entities who are in charge of ensuring safe food for the population.

The State Service for Food Safety has been operating for several months a round-the-clock hot line (37410 206040). On average 4 phone calls are received by the hot line daily. As the State Services quotes, the calls are mainly about sales of expired food products, their quality, labeling and non-compliance of sanitary conditions to set standards.

The State Service staff say that they often come across various complaints in social networks or websites and attempt to separately address all raised issues. As they say, there are often cases when citizens refuse to provide information on the violation. The State Service tries to use new information technologies and social networks to receive consumer complaints and respond to them. The Facebook page of the State Service clearly helps in that regard.

Non-governmental organizations can take the role of alarming possible violations and controlling the sector and they should be interested in promoting safe food for consumers.

The organization led by Babken Pipoyan actively works in this sector. As Babken Pipoyan says they fulfill both the alarming and control functions, as well as they engage in policy development processes. And still, partnership between the state and civil society sector is not yet very effective.

“Last year we reviewed all food supply documents of all kindergartens in Yerevan. Afterwards we proposed an action plan to the Government which was approved. The Prime Minister assigned responsibilities to carry out the action plan. A database of food suppliers to kindergartens was set up. Our recommendations included conducting a study to reveal high-risk businesses, carry out related research, assign works or terminate activities for some,” Pipoyan says. However, so far no database has been set up.

These two agencies reserve the right to carry out inspections of food quality, sanitary conditions and other related norms, as well as impose penalties on businesses in case of disclosing breaches and violations of legal standards as defined by respective laws. When food poisoning actually occurs, the case is under the jurisdiction of the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention by the RA Ministry of Health. The main function of Center is to reveal all possibly poisoned persons in order to prevent the further spread of infection.

“We have set the record in terms of the number of food poisoning cases. This clearly shows the outcome of the inconsistent work these institutions carry out,” Babken Pipoyan, the President of “Informed and Protected Consumer” NGO says.

In his recent meeting with media, Ara Asoyan, the Chief Infectionist of Armenia declared the following: “The major conclusions from food poisoning cases should be drawn by those persons or entities who produce food and provide it to relevant institutions.” However, we think the list is not complete: rel-

## Keys to Safer Food

“Let us all ask, how safe is our food?”



This question is asked by the UN Secretary General and the World Health Organization (WHO). They announce that unsafe food is a largely under-reported and often overlooked global problem. Food contaminated with bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemicals is responsible for more than 200 diseases, ranging from diarrhoea to cancers. Potential new threats to food safety are emerging all the time. WHO calls on states and all stakeholders to improve food safety in all cycles of the entire chain from farm to plate. All people involved in food production, distribution and cooking must contribute to making food safe. Governments must raise awareness among their citizens on the importance of food safety. WHO has developed “The Five Keys to Safer Food” directed to rural people who grow fruits, vegetables and fish for their own use or for sale on local markets. “Let us all ask: how safe is our food? We all have a role to play in keeping food safe from Farm to Plate”, - says UN Secretary General.

## By the force of law



The Ministry of Agriculture undertook the initiative of making amendments and additions to the RA Code on Administrative Offenses in September of this year. The draft recommendations package proposes ‘to impose a penalty on the official or implementing entity amounting to the twentyfold or thirtyfold of minimum salary in case of operating sales or public food service that is in non-compliance with the sanitary requirements and norms set out in the food safety legal documents’. Robert Makaryan, Deputy Minister of Agriculture says that these amendments are linked to recent violations and food poisoning cases reported in kindergartens and schools.

Members of the National Assembly claimed that the penalty amounts must be high as the subject matter directly relates to child life and safety. The draft package of amendments is in the agenda of National Assembly.

## Mothers and Daughters



## “I am an optimist”

Larisa Amirkhanyan's story is in very many ways similar to stories of numerous other vulnerable women living in contemporary Armenia. There is a high level of unemployment and economic emigration of men in the country that leads to splitting of families and orphaned children.

Larisa's husband worked at the textile factory in Ijevan City which closed down in early 90's. He was forced then to move to Russia to earn money. Larisa stayed in the village with two little daughters, the youngest of whom was almost one. Her husband did not appear for three years and did not support the family financially. She was forced to find sources of income for the family and tried everything from

bakery, paid work in villagers' gardens, to shop cleaner and collector of berries and walnuts for sale. She lived a life full of difficulties but she survived. Larisa managed to send her daughters to university. Her elder daughter got married recently.

“I signed up for the cooperative in our village Gosh as soon as I learnt about it. I have some relevant experience of growing vegetables in my house garden

which was for us, not for sale. We receive enormous support through trainings, consultations and quick feedback on issues. Currently we cultivate four different vegetables to understand which one will be better sold in the market. We spend an interesting day in the greenhouse full of discussions and joint work. We help the community as much as we can. We often supply lonely elderly people of village with vegetables.”

## “Every person's voice counts in decision making”

Armine Grigoryan is only 24. She is the youngest member of Gosh agricultural cooperative and does all the secretarial work for it.

Armine is a teacher-psychologist and with a specialization from the Ijevan branch of Yerevan State University. She is now doing a distance learning course at in history at Yerevan State University and teaching at her village school.

“I was present at the final meeting of cooperative set up just by chance as my mother was there too. The meeting was so interesting that I did not hurry to leave it and I even asked to sign me up as a member. The group welcomed me and even appointed me as a cooperative secretary. In my position I deal with all cooperative documents

and logistics. I successfully use the computer literacy skills I gained in Dilnet Center of Dilijan. I manage the Facebook page of our cooperative and frequently update it with new photos of ongoing activities by sharing our experience with the public. Our Facebook page enjoys certain popularity. When we just

started, some people doubted the success and proper operation of the cooperative. Whereas I was sure that everything would be great.

No matter young, retired or disabled, we all are equal. Every person's voice counts in decision making. It is the first workplace where I witness this.

*“Our life changed and we witness day by day the changing attitude of village people towards active women. People understand that new developments in life require revisiting their perception of traditional roles of men and women both within a family and a community. In a team we were able to prove that if men and women showed mutual respect and discrimination-free attitude, the most challenging issues would find a solution”.*



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