

## **Economic Empowerment of Women in Non-developed Villages of Armenia**

### **Project Description**

The aim of the project is to create an economic platform for women living in underdeveloped villages of the Republic of Armenia to sell their handmade products and become financially independent from their husbands.

During our project we are going to investigate the means of living of families in 3 small Armenian villages bordering Azerbaijan. With the help of Women's Resource Center of Armenia (WRCA) we will encourage and provide resources to women who are eager to use their skills of making handcrafted goods, sell them and make money out of it.

### **Background History**

The war in 1990s between Azerbaijan and Armenia increased the level of migration from the bordering villages to the capital city Yerevan. Those villages were the main target of Azeri troops and residents were living under the fear of being attacked. The war was the first motive of the migration. However, migration didn't stop after the war was over. The lack of job opportunities was the second motive for the residents to migrate to the capital city. They were in search of a better life and better living standards. There has always been a misconception that Yerevan will be able to host and provide job opportunities for its every citizen because of having most of the businesses centered there. Unfortunately, with the growth of the population, the capacity to provide resources to citizens gradually decreases. The migrants eventually end up being jobless even in the capital city. Regardless, migration is still an ongoing issue in bordering regions, and villages are continually being abandoned. Nowadays, the few families remaining in those villages are still struggling to meet their basic needs.

Education isn't very prioritized by people in bordering villages because of their bad living conditions. Since it's not very easy to make good living in villages, boys end up becoming shepherds with their Dads, and girls stay at home helping their mothers with household or get to learn some skills like knitting, cooking, sewing and gardening. In Armenian families, men have the highest responsibility to bring money home, while women, after marriage, become housewives because there are no jobs in villages for women to do. Eventually, women become financially dependent from their husbands, and they feel financially suppressed in the family.

The idea of giving resources and new opportunity for women to grow and become financially independent came from our experience of volunteering in villages during summers. Women have always wanted to sell their handcrafted goods and they actually made several attempts to take their products to Yerevan because there is no market in villages to sell their goods. However, they faced issues with transportation and finding a permanent location to sell their stuff, so the process completely froze. Women started to realize that there is no other chance for them to make money, therefore, they lost their motivation and confidence to promote their handcrafted goods.

Our goal is to empower women to get back to their habit of making goods and we are going to use the grant to support their small businesses by providing them resources such as permanent market, materials (wood, textile, fabric, weaving kits, knitting kits, cotton and whatever else they will need) and

transportation. Yerevan has an open-air market called “Vernissage”, where individuals sell their handcrafted products during weekends. The place is like a gallery of Armenian culture and traditions where people sell handmade jewelry, bags, T-shirts, sweaters, hats, traditional costumes, souvenirs, carpets and other handcrafts with Armenian ornaments. Visiting Vernissage is a full day free excursion which brings tourists one step closer to Armenian culture and traditions. It’s the best place for tourists and locals to find excellent gifts with unique Armenian artwork. We are planning to reserve a section in Vernissage for women from bordering villages to bring their products every Saturday and sell. We presented our idea to representatives of Women’s Resource Center of Armenia (WRCA) in Yerevan and they showed interest of collaboration. Furthermore, they had the idea of sponsoring the project if they see the project succeeding. We will measure the success of our project by evaluating the money that women make from the trade and by the help of surveys, we will examine if our project satisfied their expectations. If we succeed, WRCA will contact their sponsors to continue funding our project. Since WRCA is also in charge of helping the Ministry of Culture to organize cultural and traditional fairs, they are willing to inform the residents of the villages about the upcoming fairs so they can promote their goods also during the fairs.

### **Plan of action: Project timeline**

**May 15<sup>th</sup> – June 1<sup>st</sup>:** Contacting the municipalities of Chinari, Martakert, and Movses villages to provide us list of families willing to cooperate

**June 1<sup>st</sup> – June 15<sup>th</sup>:** Local visits to the families in Chinari, Martakert and Movses villages to get to know them, their working habits and discuss the resources needed for the project

**June 15<sup>th</sup> – July 12<sup>th</sup>:** While women are preparing their first products to sell in “Vernissage”, we will work with WRCA and the owner of “Vernissage” to prepare the space, make advertising posters for them and reserve buses to bring the villagers to Yerevan throughout the project.

**July 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>:** We are expecting to have approximately 15 women from all 3 villages together. Buses will bring them to “Art Guesthouse Yerevan” to spend two nights before and after the first day of work. We will have WRCA with us to discuss the plans for the next day and then we will all go to Vernissage to get acquainted with the space.

**July 13<sup>th</sup>:** The first working day. Setting up the tables and start selling the goods. Finish the day at 6pm and go back to the hotel to evaluate the day with women. Buses take women back to villages the next day.

**July 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>:** Evaluation of the outcome of the first working day with WRCA. Stay in contact with women to provide them resources.

**July 20<sup>th</sup>, July 27<sup>th</sup>, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, August 10<sup>th</sup>:** Work days in “Vernissage”. Busses will bring women and take them back on the same day.

**August 10<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>:** Measuring the success of the project, getting evaluations in a form of surveys from women and discussions with WRCA about the further funding and development of the project.