



## US AND ARMENIA COMMEMORATE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1988 EARTHQUAKE



On the evening of December 7, a C-130B military aircraft arrived at Zvartnots Airport to mark the twentieth anniversary of the 1988 earthquake and remember the assistance that arrived at that time from all parts of the world in a show of solidarity with the Armenian people. This time, the people of the United States sent uniforms and equipment to the Armenian Rescue Service, as well as medical supplies to be distributed to four local NGOs.

U.S. Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, Armenia's Minister for Emergency Situations Mher Shahgeldian and

Director of the Armenian Rescue Service Lieutenant-General Edik Barseghyan met the plane and greeted its crew. In her remarks, Ambassador

Yovanovitch expressed her sympathy to the thousands of Armenians who lost friends and family members in the earthquake. She noted that in the three months following the earthquake, USD 51 million of assistance was provided by the U.S. government and private organizations to Armenia. In addition, USD158 million came from other parts of the globe. The Ambassador concluded by presenting a personal message from President George W. Bush to the Armenian people.



*Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch presents President Bush's address to the Armenian people*



*Minister for Emergency Situations Mher Shahgeldian and U.S. Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch inside the military aircraft*



*Humanitarian aid being loaded off the plane*

## DEMOCRACY COMMISSION GRANTS PROMOTE CROSS BORDER INITIATIVES

*Cross border initiatives contribute to promoting interaction between Armenians and citizens of neighboring countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. In 2008, through Democracy Commission small grants, the U.S. Embassy supported cross border initiatives. The approach is largely focused on building relationships through civil soci-*



*Representatives from Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian NGOs.*



*Football teams of Gyumri and Kars after the match in Kars on 08.09.08*



*Caucasus Cheese*

### ***Trans-Caucasus Conference on the Issues of Disabled People***



The “Kariskh” NGO brought together the disabled and their advocates from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to create a network of contacts for further communication and collaboration within the framework of the “Trans-Caucasus Conference on the Issues of Disabled People” held on December 1, 2008 in Tbilisi, Georgia. The conference brought together those who have dedicated their lives to the same cause — an easier life for disabled people. The conference was also a grassroots effort to improve the relationship between the countries of the Caucasus region. The personal connections attendees made at the conference highlighted the similarities among the people of the Caucasus. The conference also created an arena for open communication and collaboration to improve the lives of disabled people throughout the region.

### ***Who's on the Other Side of the Border?***

Aiming to promote regional cooperation through the establishment of working relationships between the representatives of civil society in the cities of Gyumri, Armenia, and Kars, Turkey, the *Asparez* Journalists Club NGO conducted 10 productive meetings with the editorial boards of three of the nine newspapers in Kars. Forty-five specialists, journalists, editors, photographers, local and regional officials, and cultural representatives participated in these meetings. The project ended with a historic soccer match in Kars. The participants were Armenian and Turkish journalists, cameramen and NGO leaders. The Kars team won the game by a final score of 15:13.

### ***Create Together***

Caucasian Cheese, an effort to create a joint brand from Georgia, Turkey and Armenia, hit the markets of Gyumri, Kars and Ninotsminda early last summer. Over 3,000 people came to see and taste at a cheese exhibition organized by the Gyumri Development Foundation in May. International organizations, embassies, cheese producers, public officials and cheese lovers from Yerevan and the marzes visited the two-day exhibition. The cheese producers from Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey were also invited to share their other products. The Cheese Exhibition enjoyed extensive media coverage: Various TV channels, print, and online media outlets emphasized the importance of such projects for improving relations among peoples in the region.

## COOPERATION OF DOS IMPLEMENTERS CONTINUES

In July 2008, the Department of State (DOS), through Jerry Oberndorfer's EUR/ACE Humanitarian Assistance (HA) program, awarded a USD 20,000 grant to one of the five DOS HA program grantees – International Relief and Development (IRD) — to renovate hand-washing facilities and toilets at the Dilijan Boarding Center for Child Care and Protection. All DOS HA Implementers (Counterpart International, UMCOR, Hellenicare, and VRF) were invited to assist the Center with humanitarian commodities and services, thus making it the third joint HA project completed so far.

The Dilijan Boarding Center for Child Care and Protection had not been renovated since its construction in 1961, rendering the living conditions highly inadequate. The Center is located 100 km from Yerevan, and accommodates children from poor families of Tavush and Gegharkunik marz. Of the 119 children who currently live at the Center, about half leave the Center for weekends to stay with their families. In spite the poor physical conditions of the building, the parents are happy that their children are cared for and fed properly four times a day. The Armenian Government allocates AMD 967.7 (about USD 3.1 ) for food per child per day.

IRD completed the renovation of the sanitary facilities in three months. When the children returned from the summer holidays, they couldn't believe their eyes. Everything was new, clean, shining and bright. All four grantees contributed a portion of the assistance: Counterpart International (CHAP) provided clothing, UMCOR donated school and hygiene kits, IRD provided quilts, and VRF purchased two washing machines and a dryer. In addition, Hellenicare's Mobile Medical Team arrived from the Alaverdi region fully equipped and ready to provide day-long health checks and medical exams for the kids.



*Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch and Humanitarian Assistance Director Jerry Oberndorfer at the opening ceremony*



*"Our hands are always clean!"*



## EXPANDED BORDER MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (BMIS)



### Opening Ceremony at Gyumri Airport



Ambassador Yovanovitch and senior Armenian officials watch a demonstration of BMIS in a passport control booth at Shirak Airport



BMIS monitor shows real-time processing at a border-crossing control point. Remote officials can view live images from a camera installed at the border check-point and communicate with border guards in case of need



BMIS connects all Border Crossing Control Points with Armenian Government immigration and law enforcement officials

On December 16, 2008 the expanded Border Management Information System (BMIS) was launched at Gyumri Airport by Marie L. Yovanovitch, U. S. Ambassador to Armenia, Major-General Armen Abrahamyan, Commander of the Republic of Armenia Border Guard Troops of the National Security Service, and Ms. Ilona Ter-Minasyan, Head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Mission in Armenia. The IOM Mission in Armenia implemented this project within the framework of its assistance to the Government of Armenia on border management reforms. The International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau of the U. S. Department of State provided approximately USD 476,000 toward the total project cost of over USD 1,000,000. The Government of Armenia and system developer Aviainfotel CJSC contributed the remainder of the funding. BMIS, which was first installed at Yerevan's Zvartnots International Airport in 1999, has now expanded to cover all of Armenia's principal border-crossing control points, establishing a unified system and increased operational capacity for the management of migration processes. In 2005 it was installed at the Bagratashen land border, and in 2007 – 2008 BMIS was expanded to border crossing points at Gyumri Airport, Meghri, Bavra, Gogavan land borders and the Ayrum railway station. This project, implemented by IOM, also included the training of relevant border management staff. BMIS was developed by an Armenian information technology firm, Aviainfotel CJSC, and is a complete business application integrating all aspects of migration facilitation and management with border security and control. Through BMIS, Armenia's border-crossing checkpoints are now equipped with state-of-the-art technology for efficient border control and management. BMIS assists in combating irregular migration, human trafficking, and illegal trade in drugs and weapons, while facilitating border-crossing data exchange between law enforcement bodies. The system contains a database of both genuine and fraudulent identification, travel, and security documents issued by various countries.



## 2ND ANNUAL HARVEST FESTIVAL

A group of Peace Corps Volunteers under the leadership of Andrea Hendrickson

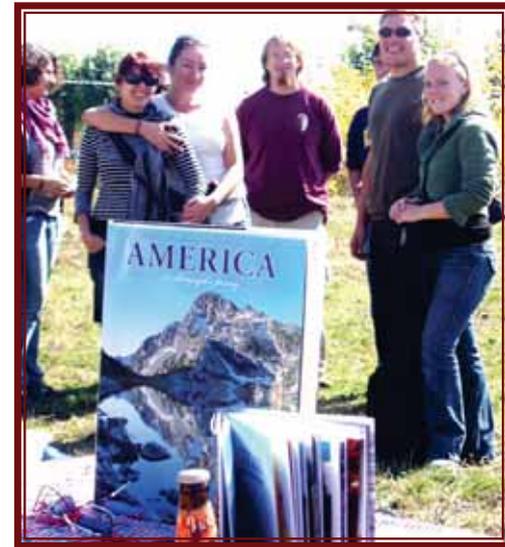
hosted an American table presenting American Culture during the Harvest Festival in Lejan village, Lori marz, in mid-October.

A run/walk fundraiser to benefit the 2nd Annual Harvest Festival was held on September 14th in Lejan. Villagers of all ages were invited to run or walk at the event, but were required to provide a 500 dram participation fee. Twenty-four people, aged 7 to 58, participated in the event as runners/walkers. Eight prizes were handed out to winners in eight categories, and a prize was awarded to the best fundraiser. The Lejan Youth Action Club (LYAC)

earned over 36,000 dram, and donated the sum to the 2nd Annual Harvest Festival.

The Harvest Festival was held on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Donations collected from the run/walk fundraiser, as well as a YES Project small grant, were used to provide refreshments, live music, fireworks, prizes, and videotaping of the event. Seven neighborhoods from Lejan displayed their harvested produce and unique dishes. A table labeled the "American Corner" showcased American food and picture books. The tables were judged based on presentation and taste. The American table won in the "Most Unique" category. A bonfire and fireworks were held later in the evening. Over 250 villagers

participated in the event, and 35 Peace Corps Volunteers visited Lejan village to support the initiative.



MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION  
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## STRUGGLING FOR WATER

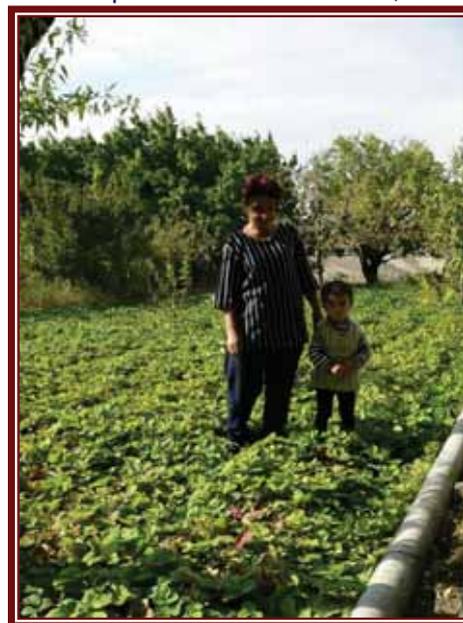


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The Lanjazat community, situated in the Ararat Valley, Armenia's most fertile region, faces serious problems in irrigating its farm land. The Northern District, a large section of Lanjazat, was forced to use expensive drinking water for irrigation purposes because of inadequate water supply. The rest of the village was using water from a pumping station. In order to help the people of Lanjazat, MCA-Armenia constructed an irrigation canal for the Northern district, with a total length of 1.7 kilometers.

Long-time residents of Lanjazat, Anahit Yengibaryan's family owns an orchard with fruit trees and strawberry plants cultivated for the local market. But drinking water was not what strawberries need to grow better and to produce more crops. It contains chlorine and is not rich in components necessary for crops like berries, fruits and vegetables to grow and flourish.

"I personally take care of the orchard, especially the strawberries", Anahit says, "We sell the strawberries in May, as this is an early variety. It is possible to have crops in the fall as well, but



Anahit Yengibaryan and her grandson Derenik in the strawberry orchard.

with insufficient irrigation we were unable to do that. This year, however, as the irrigation water has become available, we harvested some strawberries in October too".

Since Anahit was assured that the next agricultural season will be even more productive, her daughter-in-law Gayane decided to plant more strawberry plants to get a bigger harvest next season, which they will take to markets in Yerevan.

MCA-Armenia has already finished the construction of canals in four communities with a total length of 6.5 kilometers. The communities selected for these construction projects agree to provide 15 percent of the financing as a condition of eligibility. The Village Councils make the decision to apply, refer the issue to the Water Users' Association and, following revision and approval, the requests are submitted to MCA-Armenia.

# TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TO SUPPORT ARMENIAN FOOD SAFETY



ACDI/VOCA and USDA/CARD have been cooperating productively for many years, and the agricultural sector of Armenia has greatly benefited from their collaboration. ACDI/VOCA's implementation of MCA's "Water to Market" Activity and USDA/CARD's technical assistance program to support the Armenian food safety system have merged into a partnership that has reached a large number of food processing companies to help broaden the areas of available expertise and to enhance the food processing industry in Armenia. This year marked the launching of joint implementation of a food industry technical training and assistance project, which is aimed at enhancing agribusiness performance for greater profitability, stability, and competitiveness of Armenia's food sector.

Certified experts from the Agricultural Center of Southern University in Louisiana and the International Institute of Food Safety and Quality in Ukraine were invited by USDA/CARD to deliver training to specific groups and sectors to address their needs. The training offered basic food safety and sanitation knowledge to processing industries, including fruit and vegetable processing plants, confectioners, wineries, dairies, meat processing plants and food service providers. Armenian government officials, university representatives and private consultants attended the training sessions. The knowledge and skills provided are necessary for further study of the *Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point* (HACCP) system, and for introduction of modern food safety management concepts that will lead to more rigorous food safety standards. As HACCP implementation becomes mandatory



*Food Safety Team Provides Training*

in 2010 in Armenia, this USDA/CARD assistance is well-timed. The industry can now introduce the HACCP, and regulatory agencies will be able to develop HACCP regulations and conduct audits. Since retail and food service operations are the last links in the chain that provides food to consumers, the training organized by USDA/CARD also included a public health dimension, including specific information on food safety controls at the institutional level. Fifty-six food processors representing thirty-nine companies participated in the training.

*Technical Training and Assistance Methodology (TTA)* is another component of the project that sequentially builds on existing technical capacity to enable the industry to become import/export ready, and to apply the principles of proper food safety practices. This impacts business profit, expands markets, and establishes a reputation for providing a safe product to the consumer. To implement the project, the local team with a specialist from Ukraine worked with five selected processing plants. TTA focuses on improving food safety conditions at selected processing plants to promote profitability. Real-time solutions to current technological problems and food safety issues at the plant level are implemented to facilitate integration of food processing with food safety within the context of HACCP programs.



*Awarding certificates*

Implementation of these projects are ongoing, but the joint efforts are already showing a positive impact on the development of Armenia's agricultural potential.

## ENHANCED ACCESS TO CREDIT IN ARMENIA



Farm Credit Armenia (FCA), a non-bank lending institution, was established through technical assistance and financial support from USDA's Caucasus Agricultural Development Initiative (CADI).

Based on the U.S. Farm Credit System, Farm Credit Armenia was established for the sole purpose of being a source of credit for rural

Armenia. In 2008 FCA made significant strides in both making loans and seeking out sources of lending capital. As of September 30, 2008, FCA had made forty-five loans totaling over USD 450,000. Of this amount, over USD 246,000 came from lending capital awarded to Farm Credit Armenia by Millennium Challenge Armenia (MCA) as part of MCA's Water to Market credit facility. Perhaps most significantly, Farm Credit Armenia has changed attitudes regarding lending to the agricultural sector among Armenian commercial banks. ACBA Credit Agricole, a commercial competitor to FCA, was formed to serve the agricultural sector, but had turned away to focus on Armenia's booming construction sector. Recently, ACBA has come back to agriculture, developing new lending products tailored to agricultural customers. These changing attitudes toward agriculture among the lending sector are the most important sign that CADI's work in the farm credit area is achieving results.



## RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY MARKS REOPENING OF REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT CENTER IN GAVAR

On October 28, a ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the official re-opening of the Regional Employment Center in Gavar, a facility designed to address the employment needs of local residents. The community of 3,116 registered unemployed and 110 employers seeking to fill vacancies will be the first clients and direct beneficiaries of the renovation and model office creation. Thanks to USAID's technical assistance, area residents will have more opportunities and better conditions for training and work. U.S. Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch and RA Minister of Labor and Social Issues Arsen Hambardzumyan were the guests of honor at the ceremony. The ribbon-cutting, held in Gavar, was the last of three regional employment centers opened in October (the others were in Charentsavan and Hrazdan). These facilities were renovated and refurbished within the framework of the USAID/Social Protection Systems Strengthening (SPSS) Project. Earlier this year, five centers renovated by the USAID Bridge program were re-opened in Dilijan, Ijevan, Berd, Alaverdi and Abovyan. The renovations and assistance are intended to support improved services, and have emphasized access, accountability, and a professional atmosphere. Most importantly, the project has enabled the State Employment Agency (SESA) to create a "model office" that brings together the

best in administration, customer service and technologies to effectively serve the Armenian workforce and local companies with a full range of services.

In their opening speeches, the officials spoke about the main objective of model offices: to create new methods and approaches that are responsive to a market-driven, market-adapted system of social protection and self-protection.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



*Ambassador Yovanovitch is greeted by the Head of the State Employment Service Agency Sona Harutyunyan at the Center.*

# COMMUNITY SELF-HELP FUND

Improving Economic and Social Conditions of Communities in Armenia  
**SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS**



The Community Self-Help Fund (CSHF) program - one of the largest programs implemented by Save the Children - marks its completion. This five-year program, funded by the US Embassy and USAID, has recorded tremendous achievements since it began in October 2003, providing small grants to improve the economic and social conditions of communities in Armenia. 66 projects were funded through the CSHF program, resulting in the improvement and upgrade of kindergartens, schools and other educational institutions, health clinics and hospitals, social and cultural infrastructure, and irrigation and drinking water systems. Around 80,000 people directly benefited from the program. The projects played a vital role for community residents by helping overcome community problems and encouraging a spirit of self-help: communities contributed 38% of the total cost of these projects in the form of cash, materials and volunteer work. Another significant impact of the projects was the creation of 917 temporary and 99 permanent job opportunities for low-income people in these communities.

The CSHF program succeeded in the following sectors:

**Early childhood education and services** - 24 kindergartens throughout the country, 5 primary schools and one vocational training college - full or partial renovation and furnishing of buildings, and teacher training in interactive teaching methodologies.

**Culture, sports, recreational opportunities, and extracurricular education for children and youth** - 18 projects - established/revitalized cultural facilities, sports clubs, playgrounds, and provided arts and crafts and computer classes.

**Primary and reproductive health care** - renovation and furnishing of health clinics and maternity hospitals.

**Drinking water** - construction and repair of 10 drinking water systems.

**Irrigation** - 2 water systems in rural areas were rehabilitated by the CSHF program, to the benefit of 2,000 people who finally gained access to sufficient water to grow agricultural products.

**Bridge construction** - an emergency/humanitarian response to the spring flood that destroyed all bridges in Geghadzor village of Aragatsotn province, thereby paralyzing traffic and severing connections in the village. Three bridges were constructed to ensure the residents' access to the local school, farmland and the cemetery.



## RENOVATED WOMEN'S CONSULTATION CENTER AND HEALTH POST

### OPEN DOORS IN VEDI REGION



On November 3, 2008, Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch and the RA Minister of Health, Harutyun Kushkian, cut the ribbon at a ceremony marking the opening of the Women's Consultation Center at Vedi Maternity Hospital, renovated through the joint efforts of the U.S. government and local authorities.

The Vedi Maternity Hospital in Ararat marz provides maternal and newborn care to over 13,000 women of reproductive age from surrounding communities, and records over 800 childbirths a year.

The renovated Women's Consultation Center at the hospital, coupled with the clinical training, basic equipment and supplies provided by the USAID-funded Project NOVA, will considerably improve the quality of healthcare services offered to rural and semi-rural communities. It is expected that the Center will increase the use of healthcare services before and after pregnancy, thus leading to a reduction of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Project NOVA also established a School of Motherhood at Vedi Maternity, which now provides counseling, physical and psychological instruction on childbirth, healthy lifestyle, breastfeeding and proper newborn care, as well as yoga classes to the mothers-to-be.



*from L to R: RA Minister of Health Harutyun Kushkian, Governor of Ararat marz Vardges Hovakimyan, USAID Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia Douglas Menarchik, US Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch*

Project NOVA also works in ten rural communities in Vedi region through its Community Partnership for Health (CPH). As part of this initiative, NOVA creates local Health Action Groups to identify existing health problems at the community level, and to develop an action plan and budget to address these problems. Yeghegnavan village is among the ten rural communities participating in the CPH initiative. Pro-

ject NOVA undertook the renovation of the village's dilapidated health post, contributing 58% of the total expenses for renovation, while the village community contributed the rest through in-kind and financial contributions. The Yeghegnavan health post now has three newly renovated and furnished rooms with a separate entrance, a tiled floor, a water tank with running water, and electricity. It is ready to serve the village's 1,830 inhabitants, including 379 women and 338 children. In addition, the village community nurse completed NOVA's performance-based *Safe Motherhood Clinical Skills* training course, which will enable her to provide better maternal and child health services as well as to conduct health seminars to raise general public awareness about health issues. The revitalized health post in Yeghegnavan re-opened its doors on November 3, marking the completion of NOVA's renovation activities in the Vedi region.

In implementing the Community Partnership for Health initiative in Yeghegnavan, Project NOVA successfully partnered with USAID's BRIDGE project – a public works program that trains low-income community members in targeted regions of Armenia in basic and skilled construction techniques, providing them with short-term employment.

### U.S. Government Assistance to Armenia Newsletter

The U.S. Government Assistance to Armenia Newsletter is published electronically twice a year by the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, producing Winter-Spring and Summer-Fall issues.

**For more information about U.S. Government-funded projects in Armenia please visit our primary website at [www.usa.am](http://www.usa.am).**

Please also visit individual programs websites:

USAID/Armenia [www.usaid.am](http://www.usaid.am)

USDA in Armenia [www.usda.am](http://www.usda.am)

Millennium Challenge Account - Armenia [www.mca.am](http://www.mca.am)

**If you have any comments, please submit them to: [yerevanassistance@state.gov](mailto:yerevanassistance@state.gov)**