
Armenia: Irrigation Projects Help Communities Help Themselves

Operating Unit: USAID/Armenia

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Related Strategic Objectives:

2.1 More Transparent, Accountable, and Responsive Democratic Governance

3.4 Mitigation of the Adverse Social Impacts of the Transition

In 1996, the 185 inhabitants of Ltsen, a small community in southern Armenia, joined together to construct an irrigation network to provide the village with water for farming. Outside of the former Soviet Union these may not seem like great tasks. However, in Armenia, as in other former Soviet countries, international aid agencies often find it difficult to bring communities together to solve common problems. The majority of citizens expect government to solve problems in their communities. Unfortunately, local, regional and national governments do not have the resources to meet communities' needs. Instead of relying on the government, the people of Ltsen Village decided to participate in the USAID/Armenia funded Community Development Project.

The USAID/Armenia grant to Save the Children to implement the Community Development Project (CDP) began in 1995. The goal of the CDP is to increase citizen participation in community rehabilitation and development activities. Under the project, Save the Children provides small grants, up to \$10,000, to address priority community needs. The community is responsible for deciding what project to undertake. The community is then asked to form a Civic Action Group (CAG), consisting of 9-12 of the most active members of the community. The CAG represents the community through the implementation of the project. The community is also required to provide at least 20% (financial or in-kind) of the total cost of the project with matching funds. However, in Armenia, the average matching community contribution — 44% — is well above the minimum requirement.

The Ltsen Village is located in an agriculturally rich area outside of Sisian in southern Armenia. Unfortunately, for 10 years, the people of Ltsen were unable to farm because of the lack of an irrigation network. As a result, when Save the Children, working in cooperation with the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), approached them with the CDP, the Ltsen community decided to construct an irrigation water network. The village needed 2,450 meters of pipelines to tap into the irrigation system of a neighboring village. With CDP and GTZ assistance, the pipelines were procured for the village. The citizens of Ltsen provided labor for the digging of ditches for the irrigation network. The new pipeline allowed the people of Ltsen to grow their own cabbage and potatoes for local consumption and to sell in neighboring villages. As a result of the new crops, the average household income increased by \$100 per year.