

Armenia

ACDI/VOCA began working in Armenia in 1992, soon after the fall of communism. In fact, VOCA was the first USAID grantee to begin work in the agricultural sectors of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Armenia. Since then, we have implemented a variety of programs that focus on developing farmer expertise and establishing better linkages between farmers and markets.

Farmer-to-Farmer Training Increases Local Expertise and Productivity

VOCA, and more recently ACDI/VOCA, have implemented a series of **Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F)** projects in Armenia and the surrounding region. The first phase was part of a worldwide initiative that developed the sustainability of private agricultural enterprises and supported a variety of organizations, including rural finance organizations. In six years, over 300 U.S. volunteer experts collaborated with 700 Armenian host organizations and farmer groups.

Through this F2F program, which ran from 1992-1998, volunteer experts taught basic skills and new techniques to Armenian smallholder farmers, farm groups, agribusinesses and rural credit organizations. This assistance covered a wide variety of topics from new cultivation practices to increase potato yields, to training on farm



machinery, fruit production, quality control and marketing.

In the following years, we built on our approach to volunteer-based assistance. From 1995 to 2001, the Agribusiness Development Program was implemented to develop innovative agribusiness capacity-building projects via grants and to complement existing F2F efforts. Demonstration funds from USAID provided technical assistance and training to local communities across the country. The grants also funded projects related to irrigation, agro-tourism, milk processing and wood production. In all, the Agribusiness Development Program distributed \$465,000 over 93 projects.

The second big phase of F2F activities in Armenia was the **F2F Caucasus Program**,

which ran from 1999 to 2008 and brought ACIDI/VOCA together with Land O'Lakes and Winrock International. This program strengthened the capacity of host organizations at the firm level. It provided direct assistance to farmers and agricultural enterprises focusing on livestock, dairy, fruit and vegetable production as well as financial services and organizational capacity building. Volunteer experts worked in a broad spectrum of small- and medium-scale agricultural enterprises involved in food production, processing, marketing and distribution.

In all, 104 volunteers collaborated with a total of 99 new organizations comprising 56 private enterprises, 42 NGO and other organizations, and one financial institution. Through this project, ACIDI/VOCA reached 3,609 direct beneficiaries, of whom 1,189 were women, and 18,014 indirect beneficiaries.

Improving Irrigation and Post-Harvest Activities to Boost Rural Incomes

Although F2F activities have been significant ACIDI/VOCA has also engaged in providing farmers with training that helps them get their products from the field to market. From 2007 to 2011 ACIDI/VOCA partnered with ARCADIS Euroconsult (Netherlands) and VISTAA (Armenia) to implement the **Water-to-Market (WtM)** activity as part of the Millennium Challenge Armenia (MCA) program.

WtM included four components: on-farm water management training, higher-value agriculture training, the provision of technical assistance in post-harvest, processing and marketing activities, and access to credit. Over four

years, 45,639 farmers were trained in on-farm water management (OFWM) and 36,070 farmers were trained in higher-value agriculture (HVA).

WtM was able to reach 10 marzes (provinces) through its training and credit programs and also establish demonstration sites. The program established 12 vegetable seed centers, which covered 160 hectares and produced 6 million seedlings. In addition, 21 collection centers were set up to serve as intermediaries between farmers and retailers.

F2F Armenia closely cooperated with WtM in a mutually beneficial arrangement. Assignments identified and developed in collaboration with WtM were of high priority for F2F since leveraging financial and technical resources allowed both projects to generate better results. F2F Armenia also worked with the WtM high-value agriculture component, providing technical assistance to a number of their clients.

WtM stimulated the agricultural sector in Armenia with market-driven interventions at all levels of the value chain, including improved farm water management and production, sorting, packing and delivery of product to processors and markets, and effective export marketing. ACIDI/VOCA's approach created an impetus for long-term change to achieve higher agricultural production levels and raise rural incomes.

ACIDI/VOCA's Legacy in Armenia

Over two decades, ACIDI/VOCA has provided support to Armenian small and medium-size

agriculturally based enterprises in the production, processing and marketing of agricultural commodities and services. This support addressed the need for agricultural reform and development in Armenia as it transitioned from state-owned to private farming. Through ACDI/VOCA's tenure in Armenia, it has provided technical assistance to agricultural enterprises through sustainable projects that leverage U.S. volunteer consultants, local consultants and demonstration funds.

An example of ACDI/VOCA's commitment to local sustainability is its establishment of **VISTAA** in 1995 under USAID funding. VISTAA is a local NGO that provides business and technical assistance to emerging entrepreneurs and was a WtM consortium member, helping to train 81,000 farmers over a four-year period. In addition, the NGO has developed training seminars in milk and fruit processing, farm bookkeeping, livestock management and veterinary care for agricultural enterprises all over Armenia.

Though ACDI/VOCA does not currently operate in Armenia, its legacy continues through VISTAA. ACDI/VOCA continues to pursue competitive opportunities in the country and surrounding region and hopes to further its legacy there in the near future.

Published May 2013