Despite Armenia’s economic growth, many small rural communities are actually becoming poorer. Women are hardest hit, especially in border areas like Vayots Dzor, where refugees from Azerbaijan make up half of the population. Here many women run households alone, working on the land to support their family. But increasingly harsh winters and dry summers are badly affecting their crops. With your help, these women can improve their incomes and status by forming farmers’ co-operatives, growing more resilient crops and using new technology.

The Project
Since 2006, Oxfam, alongside local partners¹, has been challenging inequality and promoting sustainable livelihoods amongst vulnerable and refugee communities in Tavush and Vayots Dzor regions. So far, thousands of small-scale farmers have seen their incomes rise by up to 40 per cent by working through co-operatives, while levels of inequality and women’s unemployment have decreased, and business ownership and women’s status have risen. This project will expand activities, working in a further three farming communities in Vayots Dzor in south-east Armenia, to develop women-led agricultural co-operatives. The project will support 800 farmers, mainly women and refugees as well as traders, exporters and consumers.

Project aims
- Increase the income of women – particularly refugees and displaced people – by helping them to develop successful agricultural businesses.
- Help farmers to adapt to increasingly harsh weather conditions by introducing more climate-resilient crops.
- Enable small-scale farmers to grow – and store – more good quality, environmentally sustainable and marketable produce, such as high-value fresh and dried fruits and vegetables.
- Empower more women to become agricultural and business leaders in their communities.

¹ Business Support Centre (BSC) provides training support and Horizon Fund offers interest-free micro-finance loans to farmers.
The Background

In Armenia, rapid urban expansion contrasts with the stagnation of rural economies, especially in small communities in border areas such as Vayots Dzor. Here, refugees from Azerbaijan account for half of the population. They face problems including a lack of jobs, and women constitute 70 per cent of the unemployed. Traditional beliefs perpetuate inequality and often prevent women from taking part in business and decision-making. However, many households are run by women as men migrate to look for work abroad.

Most rural areas depend on smallholder farming, but farmers face limited access to quality seeds, technology and credit. Many traditional crops are also vulnerable to the frequent frosts and drought. In Vayots Dzor, yields of fruit such as apricots are a quarter of their potential. Even when there is a surplus, produce is difficult to sell because of limited commercial links and proper storage, processing and marketing facilities.

Co-operatives are a viable solution to many of the problems facing smallholders – providing economies of scale, the ability to negotiate better prices, and greater investment in processing and storage equipment.

The Plan

Activities:

Establish women’s co-operatives:

› Set up three women’s agricultural co-operatives in three rural, largely refugee, communities.
› Train 90 members in running a co-operative, women’s rights and leadership.

Improve women farmers’ yields and incomes:

› Install three cold storage facilities to prolong the life of the co-operatives’ fresh fruit and vegetables.
› Introduce 31,500 seedlings of more resilient, non-traditional crop varieties, such as broccoli, cherry tomato and chilli peppers – for 90 members of the co-operatives.
› Establish links to a micro-finance institute who will provide zero-interest loans (around £80 each) to 90 co-operative members to fund agricultural and marketing activities.

Increase farmers’ agricultural knowledge:

› Train 90 co-operative members in crop cultivation and protection, high-value production, cold storage, post-harvest management, and climate issues.

Enhance market access and knowledge:

› Train 90 co-operative members in business management and marketing.
› Help new co-operative members promote their fresh produce to wholesale and retail markets, including two large agricultural producers and local supermarkets.
› Organise two harvest market days promoting co-operative produce and print 900 promotional booklets.
› Set up a phone texting system to inform farmers about wholesale/retail prices and weather conditions.

Train 90 farmers in co-operative management and women’s leadership
£11,355
The Impact

As a result of this project, we expect:

- Small-scale women farmers who join the co-operatives will increase their incomes by 30 per cent year-on-year.
- Co-operative members will be able to sell at least 30 tonnes of their produce to new markets in year one, thanks to the new links established with local processors and traders. They are currently only able to sell around 12 tonnes.
- As women make economic gains and become agricultural and business leaders in their communities, their status and respect in the three communities will increase.
- Farmers will be better prepared for harsh weather as they are able to grow more weather-resilient crops.

Who will benefit?

- By the end of year one, at least 400 people (40 per cent of whom are refugees) from three communities will benefit from agricultural co-operation, high-value production, training and collective marketing. A further 400 more will benefit in the second year.

Indirectly, some 2,000 villagers will benefit from free consultations, training, access to trade fairs, and the use of community cold storage and collection facilities. Agricultural businesses, traders, exporters and consumers will also have an improved supply of good quality produce.

Monitoring and evaluation

Improvements in the economic and social conditions for rural women and their families will be regularly monitored through data collection, focus group interviews, visits and reviews undertaken by Oxfam and partner staff. They will measure household incomes; volume, variety and resilience of crops produced; numbers of women involved in co-operative management; number of people accessing loans; and levels of agricultural knowledge.

Sustainability

By the end of the project six women-led farming co-operatives will be established in two districts. They will enable members to work collectively to run economically viable businesses. Small-scale women farmers will learn new growing techniques and business skills. They will be able to develop new market opportunities, and have access to financial and storage/processing facilities, enabling them to earn more for their produce, and enjoy long-term, sustainable livelihoods.

Irina’s story

Irina moved to the village of Hermon in Vayots Dzor, as a refugee from Azerbaijan, after losing her husband.

Irina works hard to keep her family warm and fed, but rising food prices and poor harvests make that increasingly difficult.

“I think prices are rising so much in Armenia because the climate means we can’t grow things any more. We grow potatoes and kidney beans and we have a walnut tree that’s famous in the village. We sell them to get money. Because of the dry weather the potato crop this year was very bad. It is not usual for this region.

Oxfam is going to help us by setting up a co-operative so we can sell our produce at better prices. It’s true, we could get more for our walnuts if we sold them in Yerevan, and even more if they’re sold green.”

Credit: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Oxfam.
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Projects Direct offer you the chance to change lives. To join forces with people and partner organisations worldwide. To know exactly where your money’s going. And, through project reports, to see change as it happens. Transforming schools, protecting communities against disaster, helping families to make a living – whatever the project, it’s your chance to make a direct difference.

The Budget

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Improve women farmers’ yields and incomes</td>
<td>£65,160</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase farmers’ agricultural knowledge</td>
<td>£10,920</td>
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<td>Enhance market access and knowledge</td>
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<td>Establish women’s co-operatives</td>
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<td>Project management, monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>£25,220</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Armenia: country profile

Population: 3.1 million
Development: 86 (of 187) on the HDI¹
GDP per capita: $5,279 (UK GDP per capita: $35,155)
Gender inequality ranking (out of 146): 60 (UK: 28)
Female seats in national parliament: 9.2% (UK: 30%)
Number of Internally Displaced Persons: 8,400 (UK: 0)²

¹ The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: life expectancy and health, access to knowledge and standard of living.
² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2010.

Countries needing your support:
Angola, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, Ghana, Haiti, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe.

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