

Growing and Developing Communities

Best practice exchange

Location -- Lezha Area Development Programme, 60 km west of Tirana, Albania



Table of Contents

- Visit from World Vision Armenia's Economic development staff to learn from the economic project in Lezha
- How the project started and developed over five years, working in the villages of the Lezha Community
- Economic Development and Agriculture in Albania, in general
- Exchange Visits and Lessons Learned
- Where are the 34 farmers Now?
- Focusing on Results
- World Vision's Armenian staff says
- Changing lives. Testimonies of those who benefitted from the project

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- **Visits from World Vision Armenia's Economic Development staff to learn from the Economic development in Lezha**

Armenian 's staff hearing about the economic development project in Lezha



In April 22-25, 2013 four Armenian World Vision staff (Irina Hovhannisyan, ADP team leader, Sahak Manukyan (TDF), Vahe Gavorgyan, ADP team leader and Tamara Barbakadze, LIFT and Meero Economic Development Improvement project coordinator, visited Lezha, Economic Development project to learn about the initiatives and learn how this project developed in this area through years. During their first day of visit, Emiliano shared about the project and the achievements. On the day two, the team, accompanied by Emiljano and two other World Vision economic development staff of Albania from areas of Elbasan and Vlora went on field visits.

Day one

Knowing how the project started and developed over five years working in the villages of the Lezha Community

To briefly examine economic development in the Lezha area

World Vision's Economic Development Project has been improving economic conditions in Lezha for the last five years. Work started first in Zejmen commune and then began in Kolsh commune, working with families in need. There are 6,500 residents in total in the project area. The project was primarily focused on the cultivation of olive trees and raising goats and for milk production. The number of farmers in the area has been increasing through these years. Today there are 34 farmers, from both communes; the project is spreading. As a result of years of training on the agriculture practices and several exchange visits by the farmers themselves to other cities of Albania, the farmers have been growing their knowledge as well as producing more goat milk, olives, and olive oil. All of which improve the farmer's economy as well the overall economy of the area as a whole.

The first meetings



Economic Development in Albania

Economic issues are at the root of many social problems in Albania. World Vision strives to help families increase their incomes so that they can provide for their children better living condition. World Vision focuses its interventions at the local level, typically working with groups of small-holder farmers, micro-entrepreneurs and vulnerable people facing barriers to earning a higher income. Participation can often open doors beyond discussions about finances improvements in other important areas of life. Once the common money-related pressure points that many families feel are relieved, they tend to be more open to reach for further improvements in the well-being in their families and their children.

The Journey of Five years of Work

Determine first what the Market does or does not need - *How the process that was used worked*

Emiljano says: “We started by going out for family visits, filling out questionnaires about their individual situation, farming conditions and potential economic recourses available at the time. To do this we collaborated closely with the Directory of Agriculture in Lezha. After the evaluation, we saw that lots of different fruits such as peach or watermelon could grow in those areas. We evaluated the process by observing the value chain of the local market the processing and selling of the product to the consumers. And we asked ourselves: Does the market need this? Is it worthy to grow watermelon or instead would it be better to grow something else? We saw that cultivating watermelon would be a very little benefit to anyone. It grows very fast and at the time the heat comes, it is already prepared to go to market. We saw that the market had no space for this product. The farmers were spending more than they were earning because there was not a good required market for this product in the country. For example, one of the families in Torovica village, had cultivated 4 hectare of watermelon and was charged \$ 70 for the fertilizer but only sold it for \$50. By the evaluation we saw that the olives are the most appropriate for these areas.

Goats Milk

Experts and economic development staff observed that milk has a market, the chain had space for this product, but we also saw that the farmers needed help in producing it from goats at that time. We invited experts in marketing and in milk production, aiming to use all the possibilities we had. We offered training for the farmers and delivered stainless still containers for goats’ milk while keeping it fresh and ready to consume. They used to use regular plastic for the milk but that did not work well for keeping the milk healthy to drink while going to market and ending up on the consumers table. We bought more than 50 of these steel bottles for about 26 farmers”.



Growing the product: trainings and safe market to the famers



World Vision in the area of Lezha saw that these particular goats would thrive well in the mountains and hills nearby to their homes. I noticed that even big markets like “Klegen” in Lezha, were interested on buying milk from these farmers.

Doing the Math

Through 2010 to 2011 the price for one liter of goat milk rose from \$0.4 per liter to \$ 0.62 per liter. So, these 26 farmers started to earn more. Each one of them had from 30 to 170 goats. 30 goats equal 30 liters of milk a d

- **Exchange Visits and Lessons Learned --Farmers gets empowered by learning new practices**

The farmer group went for exchange visits in other cities of Albania, like Korça, Pogradec and Lushje to see how other farmers for the goat flock and milk production and how to connect with the market. If the goats breed with the ones within their own families, the kids are more exposed to die before getting delivered. This was a valuable experience for them and learned the benefits of exchanging the goats with each other. This was a good start for the farmers to get more close to each other and learn to collaborate.



Exchange visits



Youth meetings

Parts of the farmers group are also 22 youth. They have interest on the agriculture and want to learn and give their support to promote the local products of Lezha region. “They have been a great indicator during the fairs we have had. Promoting the local products of their area by finding creative ways dressings in traditionally cloths,” says Emiljano

World Vision provides an additional place where farmers could sell the milk

World Vision is supporting the farmers to build a milk collection center. The center is constructed with the support of the Catholic Church. The vision is that the farmers do not need to sell individually the milk to the processors, but they can all go to one center and sell the milk with a fixed price as they have agreed altogether. In return, the farmers will pay a rent of approximately \$50, which will go directly to fund the community kindergarten of Torovica. By the end of September 2013 the center will be operating.

The milk center outside and inside



Growing Olive Trees in a Mountainous Area

We wanted to reach more families in need and increase the number of the farmers in the area. We saw that one of the things the local market was looking for was olives. We monitored the area by doing family visit.

World Vision starts searching for new ways to develop agriculture in the both communes

By observing and evaluating the land, World Vision and other experts saw that the land was appropriate for growing olive trees. In addition, the local market and factories were seeking this product. “Factories like Kallmet were taking olives from other southern parts of Albania, and it is ore affordable for them to buy the olives locally” says Emiljano,

Olive trees- Arbequina



The type of olive tree World Vision chose to plant was called the “Arbequina”-a hybrid tree with Spanish origin. This tree usually starts to provide around 20 kg of olives since its second year, in the full production capacity after 5 years one olive tree produce 30g of olives. Arbequina trees lives around 120 years. The tree itself was brought 40 years ago in Spain.

The olive has a specific: When collected, it loses its values (the level of acidity gets higher) if it sits for days not being used or processed into oil. This is the reason, why the factories are interested to collect the olive locally, because they can process faster and in this way retain the quality.

Training Farmers to Grow Olives

Training Sessions



In 2011 World Vision started to train the farmers how to grow the olive trees in the Lezha area, how to dig proper holes for planting olive seedlings and how to take care of them during the growing phase.

“Economic Development provides 2500 olive trees for 61 families in Torovicë and Malecaj commune”

Farmers received olives depending on the number of holes they dug and the area of land they had (space) for growing olives. In the first year one family benefitted approx 65 olive trees. There were even families who planted around 200 trees.

The families who worked hard were considered as the “Champion Families”. There were 5 champion families which harvested around 20 kg olives each and made 4 kg of oil. Some however, could not harvest as much using their olives to eat or for different purposes.

The next year 62 other families benefited. Among them, about 10 families had very good results the first year even though they were skeptical at first about these new ideas. The example of these families encouraged World Vision to offer even more olives. The only condition was the farmers had to plant the

seedlings deep into the soil with holes around 80 inches deep. This was difficult to do because the ground in the area is hard and rocky since it is essentially a mountainous area.

- **Growing Olives - The results after two years**

Day two- (field visits) Armenian staff visit one of the most active families in Lezha

During the second day of their stay, Armenian staff visited the family of Shkelzen Gjeloši, one of the most active families in the areas. He could get 5 kg olive oil from the second year of cultivation on. Shkelzen has three children who are all sponsored through World Vision and he is one of the poorest families in the Torovica area. He devoted special care to the trees; so World Vision offered him even more olive trees. He is very hard working person and very passionate about the cultivation of olives.

What is the project aiming for in the coming years?

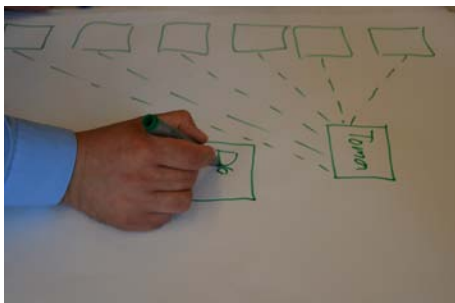
We hope that after 5 years these farmers could reach higher and grow even more” says Emiljano.

One olive tree can produce around 30 kg of olives. If you sell them to the market, one kg cost \$1 (a little more or less, this depends on fluctuating prices)

Shkelzen taking care of his olive trees



Armenians visit Shkelzen's family



Digging the holes



**1 olive tree = 30 kg x \$1= \$30 100 trees =
3000 kg X \$1 = \$3000**

This is close to a living normal annual wage in Albania every farming family that grows olives could potentially live “normally” economically on this amount

- **World Vision's Armenian staff says**

"Lezha's economic development experience is very valuable and it was very informative to see how you manage to involve community members in the project. Also, the ADP's initiatives in child protection area are interesting, again I could appreciate how you engage communities in the process," says Vahe Garvogyan, World Vision Armenia's Amasia ADP team leader. "I can trace some similarities in Albanian and Armenian people behavior. They often have low self-esteem and need encouragement and support to act. Yet, people do need to trust more on their capacity. To sum it up, I would say that trip to

Lezha was helpful and that in Amasia we can use similar models of operation," ends Vahe

Armenian staff, Vahe, during the first day of the visit



Learning through exercises



Talking with workers at the Kallmet factory

- **Where are the 34 farmers now?**

These 34 olive tree farmers are being a big help to interest even other farming families of Lezha. They are becoming the bridge for reaching even more families in need. Some of the farmers are becoming part of the Child Protection initiatives, learning about such topics as how children are treated in the families in their areas. They have also raised funds even for other causes such as for families who don't have enough to eat, they offered their help for families how could not work to dig the land and open up the deep holes that olive trees need.

The farmers are extending a helping hand to others in need

Providing goats for Gjyste's family



Changing lives

In addition to farming and growing olives, the group has even started to help other families in need. Thanks to them a mother of 6 children from Kolsh village (Kolsh commune) is now having something to give to her children to eat. Gjyste, 32, lives only with her children: the oldest is 13 and the youngest only 1 years old. The husband passed away one year and a half ago after family immigrated from the north of Albania in this village seeking a better life.

Xhemal, one of the most active farmers of Malecaj village says -- "The family did not know that we were planning to help them. We saw the case on the news

on one of our local TV news programs. The news was shocking. The mother was in deep desperate situation and children totally hoppedles.

Treading in the village of Kolsh, the family found a very little piece of land where to plant something, like vegetable, during the spring. The land around Gjyste's home is surrounded by hills.

"A perfect place to grow goats," we thought", Xhemal says. This was the moment where the farmers planned to do something to help the family.

"I thought about my children when I first saw those hopeless faces in that house, "said Xhemal. My children have food but these don't; they deserve the same, I said to myself."

Kolsh is a small village where only 10 families live, all of whom are very poor. "I know there are a lot in need, but we should start from there where the need is alarming" says Xhemal. By this proclamation, 22 farmers started to plan what to do. They thought that if they would work together and offer an amount of money, they would be able to buy some goats.

So they started to act. Each one of the farmers offered an amount, as much as they could and had in their hearts. Soon the farmers had gathered \$500 in total. "We decided right away to buy goats and we bought five, good ones, for them," says Xhemal.

“We Should Be Human – Let’s Help One Another”

“When they saw the goats, the children could not hold the happiness back. As soon as they saw them they grabbed them, hugging them in pure joy” says Xhemal. “It was a beautiful moment beautiful even for us, a moment that I will never forget.”

Now the situation has changed in this family. Children have a little milk and butter to eat. Now they aren’t obligated to eat just bread.

Xhemal remembers that day in details. The children could not hold the happiness and the joy. It was a beautiful moment for the farmers to see that how much you indicate the life of someone, even by a simple gesture like theirs. “They appreciated our help in a way that all of us were touched and proud for being able to help them”, Xhemal adds.

Xhemal tells about the farmer’s initiatives



In addition to helping poor farmers, the group helped other families in need. They donated milk and helped some others dig the deep holes, needed to plant their olive trees.

“We should be human. Let’s help one –another!” said the farmers.

“It is so precious to see what we have all been working so hard all these years for. Now I realize all the hard work was paid off and it was really worth it,” says Emiljano. “I am proud of the group that is doing such great helpful things. They are poor themselves, but their hearts are ready to offer what they have. This is probably the best result: I will remember seeing poor people come together in the same minds and hearts.”
