

## **'Sustainable Apiculture' – Community Empowerment Through Local Economies**

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**When & Where:** Lichke, Armenia, July 1<sup>st</sup> to August 29<sup>st</sup> 2014

### **Introduction: A Geo-Political Context**

The Pan-Armenian Environmental Front is a fairly new organization that was established in Yerevan, Armenia to address political, economic, and environmental issues. The organization's leaders include Anna Aghlamazyan, Levon Galstyan, and Yeghia Nersesian who have many domestic and international members and supporters.

The main concern at the forefront of their mission is to monitor and educate the public about the hegemonic mining industry in Armenia.<sup>1</sup> The land for mining has been sold to foreign interests including the U.S., Great Britain, and Russia due to political corruption. None of them are paying taxes for exploiting the plot of land. After previous research and several interviews, the PAEF put together a film that they screened in universities, libraries, and other academic institutions and spaces in order to educate audiences and bring awareness.<sup>2</sup>

Although Armenia is a presidential democracy, there is a rooted and powerful oligarchy that is profiting from this industry and none of the mining revenue is going to Armenia. As a result, the Pan-Armenian Environmental Front emerged to inform the public about the drastic environmental degradation that is occurring due to mining. The results of the research on mining have proven to be so critical that the government has banned further investigation or research on the effects of mining in Armenia. For example, toxins from mining are disposed into different bodies of water, and unfortunately, several plots of farms have suffered from the resulting carcinogens that appear in their produced food.

### **Problem**

Mining is Armenia's most valuable economic resource; however, the problem is that foreign companies have been exploiting the current mines leaving zero revenue to the native land. Because there are no set regulations, the residents of the nearby villages are suffering a slew of consequences. One primary consequence is the threat mining poses to the resident's health. The carcinogenic toxins are disposed in the lakes and rivers resulting in poisoned farms and agriculture. Nonetheless, workers remain in this line of work because the financial incentives outweigh any posed risks and danger.

### **Mission**

My goal is to introduce a safer, more sustainable alternative to mining in that the villagers will have an option that is more economically advantageous. Introducing the business of beekeeping to the village of Lichke will give residents the opportunity to a safer, more secure income. With the help of different facilitators and participants, the community will have a stronger agency towards the mining industry. The following numbers prove the benefits of apiculture over mining by comparing the price of the two produced goods.

1 ton of honey = \$12

1 ton of copper = \$8

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.vahanexploration.am/?show=category>

<sup>2</sup> [http://events.berkeley.edu/index.php/calendar/sn/iseees?event\\_ID=71610&date=2013-10-19&filter=Secondary%20Event%20Type&filtersel=](http://events.berkeley.edu/index.php/calendar/sn/iseees?event_ID=71610&date=2013-10-19&filter=Secondary%20Event%20Type&filtersel=)

Also, workers are not given health insurance for a job that poses a threat to the workers' health. In comparison, because bees are docile insects, residents will have an opportunity to practice a safe career.

### **Participants & Facilitators**

- 1) *Residents*: The families living in Lichke will have the opportunity to participate in this project. If the family is interested in starting a beekeeping business, then they will receive the resources and proper instructions for creating a local economy.
- 2) *Tigran Gurekhyan*: To insure the perseverance of the beekeeping business, Tigran Gurekhyan will facilitate a detailed orientation regarding the up keeping of beehives and the production of honey. He is currently in the business of apiculture in the city of Artsakh, Armenia.
- 3) *PAEF*: The PAEF is most involved with the mining issue in Armenia and will therefore build relationships with the residents of the village.
- 4) *Armenian Renaissance (LA)*: Because Armenia has a large diaspora community, the Armenian Renaissance in the Los Angeles chapter will bridge the gap between Armenians living abroad and projects taking place in Armenia. They will ensure the support of Armenians abroad and help implement this project and empower the community involved.

### **Themes Explored**

- 1) Environmental Justice, Environmental Degradation & NIMBY
- 2) Sustainable Alternatives
- 3) Education & Awareness
- 4) Analysis of local economies
- 5) Community Empowerment

### **Vision**

The goal of this initiative would be to give the residents of Lichke another option next to mining. If the village begins a honey-producing business, then its residents will have a concrete economic resource. By creating local economies through apiculture, the residents will not only build a stronger community, but they will also be empowered to prevent future conflict that might arise in their village due to mining. Furthermore, the process of apiculture is not a threat to human health. The residents will have an alternative career path that proves to be safe and secure.

In the past, similar projects have been implemented in the villages of Shnogh and Teghnut.<sup>3</sup> They are currently exporting their products (honey, marmalade, and dried fruits) to major cities. Likewise, Lichke can benefit from a similarly structured project.

### **Monitoring Progress**

After the implementation of the project, the PAEF will check in with the residents to monitor its sustainability. Because each season requires different conditions and procedures for up keeping beehives, the PAEF will be available for assistance throughout the course of a year.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://teghut.am/2013/12/ամանորյա-գնումներ-թեղուտից-և-շնողից/>