The Role of Women in Rural Lifestyle Development
Strengthening Cultural Heritage by MIRAS

MIRAS Social Organization in Support of Studying of Cultural Heritage was established on 6th January and based in Azerbaijan. Basic purpose is to assist in study, protection and promotion of cultural heritage. Mission is to study, protect and promote local and international cultural heritage; to assist in fulfillment of scientific-research work on study of cultural heritage; to research and popularize national-moral values; to repair and restore historical monuments and other objects; to study forgotten traditions and deliver next generation passed from one generation to other, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values; to focus on the similarities between the various heritage sectors, along with their differences. Organization implements project “The Role of Women in Rural Lifestyle Development”. On 20-26 June, 2016 MIRAS completed research stage of in Gagali, Bijo and Gashad villages of Agsu region of Azerbaijan. The project is funded by the Council on State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations under the Auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and project manager is P.h.D Fariz Khalilli, expert Prof. Dr. Kubra Aliyeva and coordinator Shola Bayramova. The purpose is improvement of social welfare of grown-ups, lonely and poor people, particularly women living in Azerbaijan and provision of their productive leisure. The project is directed to study of knowledge and practice of women with different ages and social status on local craftsmanship in Gagali, Bijo and Gashad Villages of Agsu region; teaching specification of local rugs and carpets weaving as well as cheshnis belonging to Shirvan carpet school, the development of ownership and tourism potential in the region. The project started with Gagali Village created by Akhachi hamlet over ancient Nargizava monument of Agsu region. The researchers had been in local settlers’ houses and asked certain questions. 35 women took part in Gagali survey. Notes were made on rugs preserved in houses and photos were taken. The respondents answered to questions in specific way. They said previously carpets, including rug weaving widely spread in Gagali. However, for last 20 years this field was declined and this tradition gradually forgotten. The women stated water problem, absence of mosque and hospital as main problem and carpet-making, cotton-growing and cattle breeding as useful means for social welfare of family.
They said that tourists are interested in Gagali Village thanks to International Tarakama Charshanba Festival arranged and initiated by MIRAS Social Organization in Support of Studying of Cultural Heritage. The member of rural community, Hasrat Guliyev gave information on grown interest in cotton-growing in Gagali, cultivation of cotton on 100 hectare field and women inclination to the mentioned field as traditional domain. One of traditional economy fields of the village is garlic growing. Garlic-growing is developed in all yards and is sold in Gagali markets.
The project’s next point was Bijo Village, resided by pechoy-pecheneg hamlets over the ruins of ancient Nargizava Monument of Agsu region. The project members first held meeting with the women in Bijo secondary school. The principal of the school, Yashar Garayev, PhD Fariz Khalilli and Prof. Dr. Kubra Aliyeva spoke about the project and its significance. In tote, 34 women took part in survey. The settlers noted particularly water problem, unemployment and unsafe school in the village. Bijo women said they are specialized over fleecy carpet and that they wove carpets called sleeve, mum, poppy, buta, taygol, Pirebedil, stars, khanate. A lot of carpets were documented and photos taken in famous carpet-maker women’s house. Bijo carpet-makers remembered the meeting they held with Latif Karimov, known carpet-maker and scholar of Azerbaijan. The researchers had productive talks with Sudaba Mikayilova who wove some carpets lately in Bijo Art House. The project manager Fariz Khalilli noted holding Bijo Wedding Wrestling Folklore Festival can involve tourists to the village.

During the explorations, the research group members met the family of Togrul Farajzadeh, martyr died in April war in Karabah by Armenians and the family shared their wish of creation of Bijo Heroism Park for eternization of their son name and asked socialization of this request.

The project continued in Gashad Village, called Gashkend because of location in the bottom of mountains and known as homeland of Ashug Bilal. The survey among women was held in Gashad secondary school and in some local houses. The school principal Mr. Bahruz Nuriyev expressed their wish of development of Gashad carpet-making on the level of study group for teenagers. In tote, 26 women were surveyed there. Carpet-maker Mrs. Rahila Muradova said that in Gashad all women had woven carpet, today all mid-age women can weave, too. This art is forgotten because of the absence of the market economy and new generation can not learn carpet-weaving. Numerous samples of carpet were documented and photos taken in the well-known carpet-maker woman’s house in Gashad Village. Along with traditional economy, goat is farming also strengthened in Gashad. One of the owners, Ingilab Karimov said during the talk that though they created goat farming, there is necessity for dairy products and women are taking active part in this work. Prof. Dr. Kubra Aliyeva underscored possibility of developing felting by using goat wool in Gashad Village. She also added the development perspectives of natural dyeing. The women linked migration from the village with water problem. The chief of the village municipality, Shahbaba Ganbarov said that water lines will be laid in next few years in the village from nearby springs.

In the final part of the project, there will be analysis of the surveys and observations, expert evaluations, working up proposals and
recommendations; teaching women the methods of weaving traditional and modern carpets, rugs; arrangement of courses and trainings on the cultivation of dying plants, wool procession, yarn production and photo-exhibition and hand work fair on the project outcomes and the placement of information on “rural lifestyle” section of the Organization’s web page agsunews.az.