

In a Word

Village-Based
Women's Hubs
Project



MOTHER CHILD EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

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Foreword

In 2012 when we began our Tokat-based project A Fair Start for Young Children in Turkish Rural Communities, we never envisioned that the centers we named “women’s hubs” would come to life.

Following our efforts in Tokat villages to strengthen preschool education, based on the needs and recommendations of the area’s women, we created the Village-Based Women’s Hubs Project.

This idea came about while implementing the Dere Tepe Women’s Education Support Program (Rural Education Program) in 2008 to support the development of rural women. We saw how the scope of this education project actually served to ignite the solidarity of the women and enhance their desire to collaborate with one another.

Gathering together for two hours a week for eleven weeks during the Dere Tepe Women’s Education Support Program, by the end of the program the women expressed their desire for the program to continue. “How wonderful would it be if we had a place like this,” they began to muse when they realized there was actually no place in the village for them to congregate.

Not content for that desire to remain an intangible idea, the women took responsibility for turning hubs into a reality, planning what different types of educational courses and activities might be implemented. The project was made possible by support from the “New World” Project, funded by the Coca Cola Foundation, and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The basic principle of the project was to ensure community participation at all levels in each stage. This was executed through collaboration.

Women, the village community, provincial and district institutions, municipalities, everyone participated and contributed ideas: educational courses, activities, discussions... Along with the springtime, new project ideas began to blossom.

This book, created under the auspices of the Village-Based Women’s Hubs Project, shares with us the story of the solidarity of a group of women to pursue and achieve their goal. This is the story of women in different villages whose transformation helped them develop creative solutions to bring this dream of women-centered venues to fruition.

“In a Word”, this book in your hand, tells the story of empowerment of rural Tokat’s women.

Project Team



Let's Have a Roof

Village-Based Women's Hubs Project

AÇEV gave its “Word” to women and “In a Word” is a continuation of this project. AÇEV met the women of Tokat while creating A Fair Start for Young Children Living in Turkish Rural Communities; these women demonstrated the importance of everything starting with mothers first. During the Rural Education program carried out in Tokat’s 24 villages, along with hundreds of women we looked for an answer to the question “Who are we?” Most of these women who hadn’t had the chance to continue their education started their fight for equality by asking themselves this.

After AÇEV completed education workshops for these women on issues like social gender equality, child development, environment, etc. we realized the women of this village lacked a common venue where they could congregate-- a place that could foster fellowship among them. Women who stood side by side in the streets or in the fields were actually socially disconnected from each other. The fact that women from the same village met each other for the first time during AÇEV’s Rural Education activities was a remarkable and concrete indicator of this situation.

Aware of this deficit, women told AÇEV that a venue for women was their priority. It was the women of Ormandibi, Akın, Güryıldız, and Ayvalı who first expressed this desire.

This kind of venue was critical to allow trainings and courses to develop women’s knowledge and skills as well as enabling them to collaborate, express their problems, share their experiences, and collectively develop solutions.

‘In a Word’ represented the first step of building a shared living space and a better life.

Stepping into action with the leadership of AÇEV, women of Ormandibi, Akın, Güryıldız, and Ayvalı villages received support from the “New World” Project, funded by Coca Cola and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). All the work carried out in all of the villages achieved its goals despite several obstacles. In Ayvalı and Akın, the only viable option was a vacant dormitory in the school gardens. A vacant school building in Güryıldız and an unallocated space in the bottom floor of the old municipality building of Ormandibi was allocated to these women.

Subsequently, the volunteer supporters of the project, the team of Architecture for Everyone, and the village women joined forces. These hubs were designed, restored, and equipped with the necessary supplies and furniture in accordance with the needs and suggestions of the village women.

This book describes the project and its whole process. More importantly, in addition to the project, this book tells the story of disenfranchised women who strove to socialize and develop, and ‘In a Word’, grow stronger.





Purpose of the Project

This project and its purpose emerged from the community-based needs of village women. While hubs were being built, the goals for these hubs were being shaped, as well:

- Providing women with a venue to congregate, similar to the traditional outlet men have in gathering at coffee houses or in the mosques.
- Creating a permanent and comprehensive physical space in which women and children can be provided with supplemental education where various trainings and activities can be organized.
- Supporting women's engagement in decision-making mechanisms.
- Improving the status of women and empowering them to take a more active role in children's education and in society.
- Creating a potential for change in the whole society beginning with families by helping women come together freely and helping them raise awareness about exchanging ideas and collectively learning, questioning, and exploring together.



*From Idea to Project,
From Project to Hub*



When AÇEV initiated A Fair Start for Young Children Living in Turkish Rural Communities project, we weren't expecting that it would spawn a new project, yet this is exactly--and organically-- what happened. Women in four of the 24 villages that received education within the scope of the "Fair Start" project were emphatic about having their own space, a place for them to use exclusively for their collective and personal development. The Women's Hubs project was formed, with a scope that included the provision and maintenance of these venues, furniture, educational equipment, computers, libraries, children's play corners, and physical education equipment. Also part of the Hubs project was an impetus to create a connection between these hubs and the women by encouraging them to gather around a common goal.

Within the framework of the Hubs project, four women's hubs have been opened in the Ormandibi, Akın, Güryıldız, and Ayvalı villages of Tokat as requested by the village women and in accordance with their needs and wishes.

After the opening of these hubs, their management has been conducted by the women themselves, including the organization of workshop activities, reading groups, mother support groups, computer courses, and awareness workshops. To make this possible, women were encouraged to take decisions regarding the hubs; identify and meet their own needs; search for, find, and contact relevant support institutions by themselves.

Helping women grow stronger is one of the concrete outcomes of this project. These hubs have been integral as critical venues that allow women to congregate, collaborate, exchange ideas, socialize, and receive training.

One of the most important expectations of these women who started to use the hubs was the ability to generate income. They were struggling with considerable economic deprivation.

It was these women who dreamed of a better life and a better future who hoped that these hubs could be the starting point.



Stories of the Hubs

As a result of the 12-week Rural Education program, women developed in various areas ranging from child raising to communication with their spouses. However, the most significant evolution they experienced was personal, which is the subject of this book.

As a result of these trainings, the women became more self-actualizing. They began vocalizing their opinions, emotions, and desires. They grew stronger. They began to recognize what they needed and identify what they lacked.





Hilal Kuşçul

Assistant General Manager, AÇEV

“We could see that women had nowhere to socialize, develop themselves, or spend time together. But it was more important that they could actually notice and express this need. They told us, ‘We don’t have a place where we can come together, bring our children, and receive education about reading or writing or other training that could help us earn money or even just our own place to sit and chat. We want a hub.’ This is how the idea of women’s hubs came about. I can say that these hubs are the result of long-term activities such as Rural Education, meetings held with mothers regarding preschool education, etc.”



“Women who attended the Rural Education program wanted to receive additional training. This was their demand from us. They met each other, established relationships and they just wanted to continue this. But they needed a venue and a purpose for this. Women groups were formed in some villages during our trainings. They were gathering together and exchanging ideas with us outside the trainings, even accompanying each other arm in arm to the doctor.

At the beginning we would inform the village headman , imam, and school principal when we arrived at the village. However, we eventually began contacting the women directly. They started to give names to themselves: Happy Women, Women of the Sun, Modern Women, etc...”



Emine Kuzutürk

Project Coordinator, AÇEV

Most importantly, women needed such a place where they could feel a sense of influence or personal authority. In Turkey, it is women who run the houses regardless of their education level or socio-cultural and economical status. We even have proverbs like “men make houses, women make homes”. However, women still lack a sense of voice or authority because even in the homes they create, women are subservient to the men of the house, whether it is the husband or father-in-law or brother-in-law. In the rural areas, unlike cities, it is the men who are visible and have authority most of the time, not only at home but also in the garden, in the field, in the streets, and in fact most public places. Although limited, men still have places to go to socialize freely and express themselves. They can feel a sense of belonging in mosques, coffee houses, open meeting areas in the village, and in the streets in general. Yet women cannot pass by the coffee houses, let alone enter them. Except for the spot in front of their houses and their immediate neighborhoods, women cannot visit, take casual strolls or linger in places without a reason. These are unwritten but unbreakable rules of rural life in Turkey.



“Women should trust themselves to be able to do something at this point. Typically, a village woman cannot go out to hang clothes if her house is facing the coffee house, let alone open a hub for themselves and go there... To be able to accomplish this is a very important achievement.”



Seden Karakurt
Research Specialist, AÇEV



“When we were talking in Akın Village, this is what women told me: ‘If we manage to create hubs in our village, women will step into a new world. We will have somewhere to gather, visit with each other, and receive education.’”



Emine Kuzutürk
Project Coordinator, AÇEV

And that’s why these women’s hubs mean more than you can imagine for women. Our conversations with the women in Tokat confirm this. Although women said they were happy at home, some of them even confessed that they felt much freer and relaxed in these hubs opened by AÇEV.

Some of the women see these hubs as a private space which they don’t have any place else --a place to socialize and carry out activities with many other women. They believe they can express themselves in these hubs.

“The main reason for these hubs is to receive education, but they also need a place to socialize as well. For instance, they say, ‘Men have coffee houses but we have nowhere.’ I believe that socializing and education go together. The women stated that they always wanted a place they could feel safe and comfortable, take their children along and receive education.

The issue of children is important. They don’t want to leave their children alone. Especially preschool-aged children... When they attended the Rural Education program, they experienced children’s reading groups, coffee meetings... These women had never experienced or even thought of these kinds of things. After seeing these, they started asking ‘Why shouldn’t we do this? It’s possible. We could manage these kinds of things.’ And it was the women’s hubs that made their dreams come true...”



Hilal Kuşçul
Assistant General Manager, AÇEV.



Founders of the Hubs : Women



The Process?

Women expressed their desire for these community centers and it became evident that they needed their own venue. So, women's groups started looking for a proper place in the village.

The former school, dormitory, vacant houses, municipality buildings... It was apparently not going to be easy to identify viable solutions. Many doors were shut in their face. They struggled considerably because everywhere was already occupied. One was a classroom for Quran training, another one was a depot, or an annex to a health care center, etc. For a long time, women wandered around their villages like nomads searching for a suitable place.

You might assume that there should be plenty of available venues in villages but the truth is unfortunately different. There are plenty of open spaces, gardens, orchards, etc, but enclosed places are limited. There are places with predetermined uses like schools, health care centers, Quran training classrooms, mosques, and wedding halls, but those are difficult to arrange even if you offer to pay for use of the space. Under these circumstances, it was much more difficult for women to find a place. But they were the winners in the end. And they

were now wandering around and searching for a place, talking to school principals, mukhtars (village headmen), even with officers of the Provincial Directorate for National Education.

After long-term searching, certain places were chosen with the support of AÇEV. The women's hubs were found. These were Ormandibi, Akın, Güryıldız, and Ayvalı villages. Now it was time to construct them.





Emine Kuzutürk
Project Coordinator, AÇEV

“Community-based activities are not written in projects as a matter of course. This is because these activities emerge during our project implementation in the villages. When the request for these hubs arose and we began researching options, it turned out that all of the most viable options required repair or outright renovation, and of course maintenance, which requires a certain amount of budget. ‘What are we going to do? Where will we find this money?’ we thought.”

In addition to our cooperation with the UBS Optimum Foundation, a grant scheme was announced within the scope of the ‘New World Project’ funded by Coca Cola, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at that time. With the permission of the UBS Optimum Foundation, we applied for this grant and our application was accepted. We received the grant and commenced the construction of the women’s hubs. We received help from the Architecture for Everyone Foundation to turn such small places into multi-purpose, modular venues.”

“AÇEV contacted us and told us about their project. They told us that women in the four villages of Tokat wanted to have their own places, and that different venues had been identified for modification, including an old dormitory and a municipal building. Women wanted to use these places for various purposes like receiving education, producing, and chatting.”

Immediately after our meeting with AÇEV, we wanted to see these places for ourselves and ask the women directly exactly what they wanted. We visited the villages with the project team of AÇEV, talked to women, took photos of the potential venues and took measurements. We asked them if they needed toilets, what their ideal heating system would be, if they preferred the floors to be covered by laminated flooring or carpet, if they needed a place to put their shoes outside etc. and took notes. When we returned to Istanbul we prepared our designs according to the venues and the women’s expressed usage needs and preferences.”



Emre Gündoğdu
Architecture for Everyone
Foundation



Hilal Kuşçul
Assistant General Manager, AÇEV

“We paid great attention to ensure that all women would be able to equitably utilize these hubs to socialize and receive education. We tried to include women from all families and different sections of the village. We tried to create a place where they had equal chances to have input.”



Financial support for equipment would be provided by UNDP and Coca Cola. Architecture for Everyone agreed to prepare the architectural project designs of the venues. AÇEV would ensure the coordination among the women, the villagers, and the relevant institutions. The process was slightly different in every village, but it was always women who played the lead.



Ormandibi Village

Ormandibi Village is located in Tokat and has limited facilities and sources of income. Until two years ago, it was a municipality but lost its municipal status and reverted to village status. These kinds of trainings or activities were rarely held here before. Therefore, when AÇEV visited Ormandibi for our Rural Education program, they asked questions like ‘Are you selling something? Are you here to do health screenings?’

Located next to a forest, Ormandibi is one of Turkey’s most beautiful villages. The best thing about this village is its women... Despite acute economic hardship and all the difficulties they face, they respond enthusiastically to the slightest encouragement. They benefited from the trainings of AÇEV so much that they joined together and started to look for a place to congregate. And they eventually found a place after a long search.

The women of Ormandibi Village now have a place they hold the keys for-- a community center they manage on their own, where they receive education, exchange ideas, produce their crafts and dream of doing business in the near future. Women who hesitated passing by the men in the coffee houses two years ago now sit at the same table with them and hold meetings. The distance they covered in two years gives clues about what goals they can achieve after this.



NECLA KARLIK
Ormandibi Village

Necla Karlık is just one of the tens of women who benefited from A Fair Start for Young Children Living in Turkish Rural Communities implemented in 20 villages of Tokat.

She is 38 years old. She has four children and had her first baby at the age of 17. Primary school is her highest level of education.

Necla lives in Ormandibi Village where people earn their livings by breeding livestock and via forestry. Many people migrate away from the village since sources of

income and social facilities are limited. As is the case with most villages in Anatolia, women are deprived of educational and social rights here. They obviously don't have the right to speak in or outside their homes. If they are not going to the field to work, they typically can't go further than their house or their neighbor's house. Most women did not even visit their children's school before the trainings of AÇEV. Passing by the coffee house, which is completely dedicated to men, was regarded as a big shame for village women. They abstain from passing by the coffee house when they go somewhere.

Necla says she benefited a lot from AÇEV's trainings and would have brought up her four children in a different way if she had received these trainings years ago. While she learned a lot on subjects ranging from women's health to child care, the two things that excited her the most were going to the cinema for the first time in her life, and having a place where she could be together with the other village women. Necla describes the day she went to the cinema:

"I had no idea what cinema was. We went there thanks to AÇEV. I had heard about it before but only knew its name. It was such a great thing. I was so excited. I had so much fun. Now, when my children tell me they want to go to the cinema, I tell them they can go. I wouldn't give them permission before."

The Rural Education program has been a milestone in the lives of tens of women like Necla living in Ormandibi Village. These trainings make them more aware of themselves as well as their surroundings. They grew stronger. They became more aware, started to question, and became more self-confident. They began to say, 'I am here' and express their opinions first at home, then in the school of their children, and then within the society. They saw what they needed and what they lacked. They started to express their wishes. One of their first wishes was a 'hub'. Whenever they wanted training or a course, they were faced with this problem.

Men had places like coffee houses or mosques to meet in but women had nowhere to come together or chat. For this reason, most of the women didn't know each other. Necla summarized this as follows:

"As the women of Ormandibi, we never sat down together in our lives. As if we had had a fight and didn't want to talk to each other, we would sit in our own houses. We knew each other but didn't mingle. We met each other and exchanged our ideas thanks to AÇEV."

Necla is one of the women who struggled to open a women's hub in Ormandibi Village. It wasn't easy for them to find the place, but eventually were able to renovate a former municipality building.

Necla and her friends cleaned it themselves and made it their own. But they needed more to turn it into a place they could utilize. This is where AÇEV came into play. AÇEV spoke with the Architecture for Everyone Foundation. They took measurements and notes about the wishes and expectations of women, completing the job in November 2015. It is no doubt thanks to the



contribution of many people and institutions such as AÇEV, UNDP, Coca Cola and the Architecture for Everyone that these places turned into valuable hubs. But the greatest contribution came from the women themselves. Women of Ormandibi Village literally fought tooth and nail to create these hubs:

“It was Şengül, me, and Sevim who cleaned our hub; all women did it together. I never said it wasn't my job. I wanted it to be spotlessly clean. I wanted our village to set an example. I enjoyed doing it. And the result was as we had dreamed. We could never dream of it before.”

Women of Ormandibi now have a place with couches where they can sit comfortably, computers and tables where they can work, a kitchen, and a separate play corner for their children. They have been actively using their hub for the last two months. They had an easy computing course that they opened with their own efforts and 15 women received their training certificates. Now they are getting their appointments from the hospital via Internet and using websites like e-devlet (e-state) and İŞKUR (the Turkish Employment Agency). They even browse the internet and discover websites about hobbies and find out new knitting patterns.

Necla expresses her excitement about this hub as follows:

“Even if I don't have anything to do there, I make up an excuse and pass it by every day. For instance, today, I had a look at it while I passed by and felt so relieved. I hope this will be a much more cheerful place. Our biggest gain from the trainings is this hub. Do you know why it is so important? You can do anything if you have a place.

Now, Necla's biggest dream is doing business and establishing an income generating model for both herself and her friends. They already contacted İŞKUR and KOSGEB (Small and Medium Industry Development Organization) for this. Necla says, “A piece of land of 500 m2 would be enough for me. I want to grow strawberries. I could sell it easily. I would say ‘they are like honey, they are like sugar’ and sell it.”



Sevim Yurteri is 50 years old. She married her cousin at the age of 15. She has five children ranging from 12 to 32 years old. His oldest son is a teacher. One younger son is waiting to be appointed as a teacher. She herself is only a primary school graduate. Her husband is a construction foreman.

Together with her neighbor Necla Karlık, she worked heartily for the women's hub to be opened in Ormandibi Village. She cleaned it and attempted to arrange courses. Before the Rural Education program of AÇEV, these were distant dreams for Sevim, just like for the other women of the village.

These trainings excited Sevim as she never visited the school after she finished primary school, even to see her children's school. She states that she has been more understanding towards her children and learned a lot of things about environment and nature thanks to Rural Education activities. She admits, though, that the biggest change was in herself. "I am braver. I feel like I am capable of anything. I believe in myself to the full extent. I am in the middle of my life and just woke up."

Sevim expresses the change in herself and her view of the world with these words. She became a candidate for village headwomen in the last elections with the support of her family and friends. "After the municipality was gone, it was like an earthquake. I said I could do better as a woman and felt the courage to become a candidate," says Sevim.

She realized her biggest dream of beekeeping after the trainings of AÇEV. She contacted the District Directorate of Agriculture and managed to have a beekeeping course in their village. And after these courses, she started beekeeping and made money:

"We can't produce anything as women, only work in the garden or the barn. This is work that we already do but we need work that earns us some profit. And we can do that by beekeeping because it is a profitable business and our region is suitable for that. After I participated in AÇEV, we met the District Directorate of Agriculture, thanks to our trainer. We requested to have a training there; they said 'we will open it in your village.' And they really did. I took the course and did it. And now I make good money."

When we ask about her dreams today, she says, "I want to be a businesswoman. I want to make money. My dream is earning and spending my own



SEVİM YURTERİ
Ormandibi Village

money,” and she describes how they struggled for their new hubs:

“We didn’t have a place to come together as women. We had to go to somebody’s house in the village. We were sitting in the living room but didn’t feel comfortable. We wanted to meet and produce our handicrafts but had no place for it. Men go to the coffee houses but we didn’t have a place to gather. We had a lot to share but didn’t have the chance.

Now, for example, we can share our problems, talk about them, and get advice. Others said, ‘You are wasting the government’s investment.’ Even my father said

so. I said, ‘You will see when we run it. We will produce and use the space and you will see then whether it is the women or the men who are more productive.’”

Sevim was spending her time mostly at home in front of TV or doing handicrafts or working in the garden or the field like the rest of the women in the village, but now, she’s very happy about having a place where they can gather, exchange their ideas, produce crafts, and share their problems. She says, “We couldn’t even imagine to have a place like this,” and visits it almost every day and meets her friends. She believes that “age doesn’t matter” and as a response to those who have been criticizing her; she wants to grow her business as soon as possible.





Merve Gül Özokcu
Architecture for Everyone

“When designing the women’s hub in Ormandibi we talked to the women from the beginning to the end. We discussed the project alternatives. They were involved in the whole process. It helped us a lot that this group of women were so eager and cooperative. They could tell us clearly what they really wanted. Moreover, they were hanging on our words regarding our suggestions. For instance, they asked for a room heater instead of a stove and they took the responsibility of opening and heating the venue early in the day as required by this system. They asked for sofa-type seats that were comfortable and high off the floor. We tried to fulfill their demands through modular systems as there would be times when a classroom was needed. They wanted to be able to supervise their children and work without being affected by their noise. So we designed a separating curtain out of transparent plastic. We made tables and chairs suitable for children of different age groups as well as enabling a playing environment by bringing them together in different ways. Husbands of some of the women also helped with the construction work. There were tiling experts and construction workers among them. Everyone helped as best as they could. In the end, we managed to create a spacious place where everyone would enjoy spending time.”



“The women’s hub is located at the beginning of the village and it’s a bit far from the houses; furthermore, women have to pass by the coffee house to be able to go there. When they told they wanted this place, I asked, ‘Are you sure you can go there? You have to pass by the coffee house.’ They said, ‘We are sure we can pass it.’ They even said, ‘We want to have a garden to sit in, as well’. On the way to the Provincial Special Administration, we told them to come with us and speak for themselves. All of the members of the Council of Provincial Special Administration who joined the meeting were men except for one. The only women were AÇEV and the villagers. The women went up to the rostrum and spoke in the Council of Provincial Special Administration. They spoke so well. They looked so strong. All of the people on the Council were surprised. But they believed in these women, as well. And this is how they acquired the place.



Emine Kuzutürk
Project Coordinator, AÇEV

Now they are using it actively, holding efficient discussions amongst themselves. For instance, when one of them demands a computer course, another one says, ‘What will you do with it at this age? Can you earn money with a computer?’ Then the first one says, ‘It’s not only about earning money, we want to have an education, as well.’



Akin Village

Akin Village

Akın Village

Located on the plains of Çamlıbel, Akın Village is 28 km from the center of Tokat. However, although it is that close, it is far from many facilities. With a population of around 1,500, the income source in Akın is agriculture and livestock breeding. It has lush gardens and affluent fountains.

Compared to the other villages of Tokat, Akın Village can be regarded as relatively wealthy. Villagers have the gardens and animals to let them earn their living at least. However, they don't have a business to generate income nor a place to share their social life. It wouldn't be wrong to say that the only social area in the village is the school at the beginning of it. As soon as you enter the village, children welcome you with their cheerful sounds and smiling faces.

Before the Rural Education Program of AÇEV, no institution or non-governmental organization had come to Akın to provide any ongoing education for adults. But following the trainings of AÇEV, an embroidery course was opened by a public education center at the request of the village women. There is not even a coffee house in Akın, which is typically a must for all Turkish villages. Men from Akın go to the coffee house in Çamlıbel, which is the closest adjacent neighborhood, or else they gather in front of the market in the village.

On the other hand, villagers of Akın are so entrepreneurial. Akın's women are very enthusiastic about trainings, courses, and investments. Compared to the other villages of Tokat in which AÇEV implemented its project, this village showed the highest participation. They dropped everything to attend all trainings. Moreover, while it is the seventh or eighth grade students who carry out the reading groups for children in other villages, it was the mothers who did this in Akın.

Following the Rural Education program, women of Akın Village asked for a place where they could gather, have courses, and continue with their education. They shared their request with AÇEV officers and the school principal.

Now, the former dormitory building is their new hub. They settled in their new hub which once seemed like a distant dream that they thought would help them step into a new world. They decided every detail up to the color of its walls and now, their biggest wish is to be able to produce.



NEŞE DELIOĐLAN

Akın Village

Neşe Deliođlan is 34 years old. She wasn't allowed to study after secondary school. When she got married at the age of 18, her dream of 'going back to school one day' came to an end. Now, her biggest wish is to ensure that her four children continue their studies.

Neşe lived with her mother- and father-in-law for the first ten years of her marriage and now, she and her husband have moved to their own house. Even so, her mother-in-law and disabled sister-in-law are now living with her. "It was okay living at my mother-in-law's house, but to have your own house is of course better. I did everything regarding my house. Now, I can say I made an effort and did everything myself," she says.

Neşe learned a lot about her relationship with her children in the Rural Education program. She realized that she had not expressed her love for her children before and hadn't let them play. She says she is trying to make up for this as best as she can now: "I used to be unable to express love. The first time I hugged my son was during his engagement ceremony. He said, 'Mom, I felt you hug me for the first time.' I felt so sad that I wished I hadn't worried about public opinion and instead hugged him more before."

Another important development for Neşe from her AÇEV trainings has been “understanding how important it is to treat girls fairly”. She recognized her own value as a mother, as well. Thanks to these 11-week trainings, she grew stronger and changed.

Neşe and her friends requested something from AÇEV officers who contacted the village headman and the school principal when they came to the village. “You give the education to us and establish relationships with us but you always contact the village headman and the principal. We would like you to contact us instead when you come here,” they said. They also asked for a place for themselves. And they set their eyes on the dormitory building which was in disrepair in the school garden. They spoke to the school principal and came to terms but it was in such bad condition that it took a long time to renovate it.

“We never thought we could reach these goals. And this is how our group took its name. It seemed so unbelievable and distant when AÇEV officers told us they would equip this place and bring computers...”

Neşe says that even the roads they took changed. The women of Akın Village rarely left their own homes in the past and often took the longer route to reach their destinations but now they are much more visible. Neşe says, “I think we deserve our name. We couldn’t come to this point if we had not been modern. On the way to the course, we passed by men gathered together but we don’t mind anymore, we left those problems behind.”

Neşe and the modern women of Akın now have their own hub thanks to their outstanding efforts as well as the support of school teachers, women, their husbands, and architects. The hub is equipped with computers.

At the women’s request, the shelves were stacked with books and magazines. Now, when we ask them, “What does this place mean to you?” Neşe describes her feelings:

“Our women’s hub means a place which belongs to women and brings them together. It was really difficult for us to find and create this place. This is our place. What else could we ask for? It may sound weird to you but it always feels better when you have your own place.

I go there for embroidery now, for example, and the atmosphere is so relaxing. I feel more relieved mentally. At home, there is always something to do, children or other distractions... But there, there is nothing. It is like therapy. I feel more relaxed when I go back home. We women support each other when we come together and it creates a great atmosphere. I believe that there will be many more friendships in women’s hubs. We will treat the hub as our own.”

Neşe and her friends opened their doors to students preparing for TEOG and university exams, as well. Youngsters in the village will be able to benefit from the library and the study room.





Merve Gül Özokcu
Architecture for Everyone

“The building we identified in Akın village was in ruins. The women didn’t believe this place could be restored; they wanted to have the best, if possible. We took the architecture students to the village in June and held a design workshop. We worked by taking into account the women’s needs and wishes. We shared and discussed our alternatives with them. For instance, the entrance of the building is through the school garden, but they wanted an independent entrance. Unfortunately, we couldn’t manage this due to the physical layout, but we visually separated the entrance of the building from the outer environment using a screen. This screen allows the women to act as they wish and functions as a windbreaker. It became possible for them to use a separate room as it allowed them to have somebody take care of the children. Therefore, unlike the other villages, we focused on making designs that allow children to play in Akın. We decided everything together including the color of the curtains and the sofas. Some said it should be purple, some said it should be dark so that any dirt wouldn’t be visible. In the end, we took their requests into account and tried to create a place for women and children within the bounds of possibility.”

“The women of Akın are so enthusiastic. Just think, AÇEV held a training and they had a different kind of education, an activity in their village for the first time in their life. Their reaction to these trainings was so great... They became more conscious. Their village school helped them a lot, as well. They asked for the hub venue directly from the school principal; we weren’t involved in that process.”

Recently, when the mayor visited the village, the women spoke to him directly. Now, our women’s hub is open after considerable efforts. They have their computers and courses. There is a course for tailoring. They started making clothes. Specialists from Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Policies are visiting them. Now, the women are adapting themselves to their new place through these trainings while discussing what else they can do and how to keep the place active.”



Emine Kuzutürk
Project Coordinator, AÇEV



Cengiz Polat
Principal, Akın Village

“Mothers didn’t visit the school frequently before. They hesitated or didn’t make the time. They changed for the positive following the trainings of AÇEV. They started to visit the school, asked about their children, and showed interest. So, we were able to create a bond with them. Now, they are quite used to being closely involved with the school. If we make an announcement now, they will drop everything and come. At least 30-40 women will gather immediately. It’s also great that they found a name for themselves. They believe they can do anything if they try.”





Güryıldız Village
Güryıldız Village

Güryıldız Village

Güryıldız was a small village until 15 years ago, but today, combined with the neighboring villages of Yazıbağı and Küçükyıldız, it turned into a town. It has its own neighborhoods, municipality, a big school, and more diversified sources of income compared to the surrounding villages.

The village relies on agriculture and livestock breeding. They have gardens, orchards, and fertile lands. The villagers haven't given up on their lands yet. They still work the land to earn their living. Another advantage is its proximity to Tokat. They have few problems with transportation. Consequently, the children's school attendance rate is high. After children finish secondary school in Güryıldız Village, they can easily attend high school or university in Tokat. And this improves the communication between the town and its surrounding communities.

On the other hand, it can be difficult for women to gather as it is a big village. Following the Rural Education program, the Güryıldız women's request for a venue resulted from two necessities. First, the population of young mothers is high and these women are eager to learn about child care. They want information about how to raise their children better and they wanted to be educated.

After the Rural Education program, their most common question to AÇEV officers was : "How can we continue these trainings? How can we be more useful to our children? We want to play with them more consciously."

Men of Güryıldız are enthusiastic, as well. It seems that the coffee house meetings held by AÇEV have been very useful. They are supporting every attempt towards women and children.

Secondly, the women of Güryıldız are looking for income generating models. They are working in gardens and orchards, growing grapes and especially tomatoes. But it is the men who manage the money. Women need help to learn how to earn money with the fruits and vegetables they grow and what kind of an income generating model they can create. That's why they want these women's hubs so much.



MİNE ASLAN
Güryıldız Village

Mine Aslan is 24 years old. She came to Güryıldız as a bride. She lives with her husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law and four-year-old son. Mine is a young mother and complains about the tedium of her daily routine. “It is always the same. Do the cleaning, wash the dishes, take care of the child.” The opportunity for diverse activities is what excited her about the women’s hubs. She believes she can improve herself in this community center. She hopes to learn new things and enjoy her time.

Mine has been living in Güryıldız for seven years but has never seen what is beyond the mosque. That is, like many other women in the village, she doesn't leave her house or neighborhood. She thinks the hub will provide a chance to meet other women and come together with them though it is the idea of being able to read books is what appeals to her most. She describes her dream hub as follows: "I love reading books but I don't have time at home. We are eight people, so it is not possible. I dream of a place where I can be alone in a corner and read books..."

Women of Güryıldız first asked for the former school building as their hub. However, as the heating would have proven problematic in such a big venue. Additionally, the village men also demanded a part of the building, so the women changed their plans and decided on the current place.

This building, which used to be an independent preschool next to the former school building, had fallen into disuse. It was in ruins prior to AÇEV's restoration. Therefore, Mine and her friends didn't believe the project would be realized. But now, their hub turned into a place they don't want to leave.

Mine says that she is very happy as she will be able to come here with her child: "It is good for both us and our children. My daughter already got used to it. We

started to come here together and she likes it a lot. She used to have to sit at home with us. Now she has toys and friends to play with. We women rarely visited each other; everyone stayed at home. We have now started to become familiar and speak with each other."

Opening of the women's hub brought along some dynamism to Güryıldız. Mine and her friends requested a computer course and a tailoring course first. Their final goal, however, is to be able to implement a model which lets them earn money via the fruits and vegetables they grow and harvest. This no longer seems like a distant dream for the women of Güryıldız.





Emre Gündoğdu
Architecture for Everyone
Foundation

“We restored a former preschool for women and children in Güryıldız. The building had been closed for 3-4 years and we could see it was deteriorating. Though not very spacious, the place was inspiring. We visited the village along with university students to experience it for ourselves and hear the women’s opinions. We listened to the dreams and requests of the women. For instance, they asked for a room heater. Unfortunately, we couldn’t do that due to lack of appropriate conditions so we arranged a stove instead with their approval. We hung some ropes from one wall to the other in the children’s room to enable different ways of utilization and to highlight the volume of the space. We opened a passage to the old storeroom for only children, thus creating some kind of game and enlarging their room. We designed a play field with cushions of different heights that can be rearranged in the new section. We installed an easy access door between this room and the kitchen at the request of the women. We tried to accommodate all requests I to make everyone happy.”





“I can say that Güryıldız has a higher population and more diversified sources of income compared to the other villages we have worked with for our project. It is a big village but still, since the neighborhoods are far from each other, there are only 20-25 women who regularly attend our activities. They work on the farms from April to the end of November so they are very busy. It is mostly young mothers with small children who attend. The same group of women who asked for this venue, also asked for courses and training. They are around 20-25 years old.”

They have limited social facilities but they are more conscious and aware of their environment since they are young. They have energy and ask for activities to spend it. After the Rural Education program, they said, ‘You keep telling us to support the development of our children, but how?’ We prepared 60 cards for child development games for them. And we are going to arrange a meeting to discuss how they can use this hub efficiently. But we want them to express their opinions and requests.”



Emine Kuzutürk
Project Coordinator, AÇEV



Ayvalı Village
Ayvalı Village

Ayvalı Village

Located in a mountainous area 120km from the center, Ayvalı Village faces the hardest conditions in Tokat compared to other villages. Livestock breeding is more common in Ayvalı as there is no land to cultivate. And that makes finding a source of income the biggest problem. Most of the men are either working in construction or as day laborers in farms or as shepherds outside the village.

They don't have running water in their houses. Allegedly, they wanted to connect the houses to the water supply network but the people of Ayvalı said, "Why should we pay for the water that comes from God?" and refused it. Mobile phones cannot pick up any signal in many parts of the village. The rate of literacy is low. There are children who have difficulties in reading and writing even at school.

The attendance rate at school is very low as children have to do the housework at home, take care of younger siblings, or feed the animals when their parents leave for work.

Until last year, there wasn't a road to allow children easy access to the school and the road connecting Ayvalı to the main road is a long unpaved, dirt road. As you see, Ayvalı is behind the times, trying to catch up while struggling with many difficulties... And this creates a vicious circle, best described by Ayşe Özer:

I am 64. I was born poor and I am still poor. We need everything, we are deprived of everything. What can we do? What can we eat, what can we drink if there is no road, no water, and no income in this village? We are ten people living in the same house. If we don't go to work one day, we are hungry that day. Everyone has the same problem. The shoulders of my two sons and husband are covered with wounds from carrying concrete in the construction sites. My husband worked in Istanbul in construction for many years. Now, my two sons do the same.



Ayşe Özer
Ayvalı Village



ELIF AÇAR
Ayvalı Village

Elif Açar is a young mother of 24 with three children. Her husband went to Algeria because he couldn't find a job here. He is working there in construction and sending money home to his family. Elif sees her husband only for a few days every three or four months.

For Elif, a hub means 'her own house.' Though she is only 24 years old, as if she has given up on her own future, Elif Açar says, "My future is all about their happiness. I first think about them."

Elif was one of the best students in AÇEV's courses. As a young mother with three children, she pays great attention to the education and development of her children. She wasn't allowed to study but she wants her own children to study at all costs. Therefore, she says that the Rural Education program was very useful and helped her improve herself.

However, the biggest problem for Elif, as with the rest of the women --and even the men in the village-- is earning money. The whole village thinks that courses which do not help them make money aren't useful. "We attended AÇEV courses including tailoring courses ,but we need to work. Without a job, courses are not useful for us," says Elif.

The Rural Education program was carried out partly at school and partly in the garden of the mosque, a place sometimes used by men as a coffee house. This is because in this mountainous village of Tokat, there is literally no available space. This is true not only for women, but also for men. Therefore, men gather together in the streets or at the beginning of a bridge, like in Akın. And sometimes they meet inside the mosque.

After the Rural Education program, the first thing women of Ayvalı asked for was a reading and writing course. Elif and her friends collected signatures and made a teacher give a literacy course.

Subsequently, Quran trainings or carpet weaving courses that were opened at the request of the women, which forced them to find a venue. Then, the Provincial Directorate for National Education decided to repair the two-storey dormitory building in the garden of the school and let them use it for these kinds of activities. But women wanted to have a place of their own. With the support of AÇEV, they managed to take the upper floor of the dormitory building. In addition to the upper floor, there would be a library for them on the bottom floor, as well.

Following this process, Architecture for Everyone came into play. They arranged the upper floor as a place for women and their preschool children, while the room on the bottom floor was turned into a study room and library where students can work.

It is again the women who asked for a study room for their hub. Most of the youngsters in Ayvalı Village don't continue studying after primary school because there was no shuttle for them to get to the closest high school until two years ago. Although finally a shuttle bus has

been provided two years ago by the authorities to solve the problem to some extent, many youngsters, especially young girls, still don't attend high school. Instead they opt for open education.

That's why a study room equipped with computers was created-- for young girls to be able to study. Now, both women and high school students are looking for ways to make use of this recently restored and inspiring hub more efficiently.



“When we first visited Ayvalı Village for a training, they thought we would set up a factory. It was so hard to explain to the villagers. Because their biggest problem is the lack of sources of income, they wanted income generating activities. And they want to turn the women’s hubs into places that enable them make money as soon as possible. There are around 8-10 women who are involved in the process and care about the hub, and this number will increase in time. Change and transformation will take time.

Although its transportation facilities and employment opportunities are harder as compared to the other villages, Ayvalı is a place where women are very enthusiastic. When they saw the hub ready and equipped with computers, this motivated them considerably because it is visible. Now, they are talking to the public education center to arrange more trainings. I believe they will implement even better things and continue progressing.”



Emine Kuzutürk
Project Coordinator, AÇEV



Emre Gündoğdu
Architecture for Everyone
Foundation

“We did some design work for Ayvalı in the center of AÇEV in February, 2015 together with university students. Following this, we visited the village to share our opinions with women. This meeting received much more attention than we expected and it was very exciting. In addition to the design opinions, we talked about examples and discussed the future and functioning of the place. It was an efficient meeting in terms of women’s participation and recognition. They wanted a place for youngsters to be able to study. To this end, we made some arrangements for a study room for youngsters on the first floor while restoring the second floor for women and children. We tried to meet their needs for both sitting and storage by constructing a sedir-style wraparound sofa from one wall to the other in the kitchen that had storage under the seats. We ensured women could keep an eye on their children through building play areas on platforms of various heights that can be viewed through the partition between the women’s and children’s sides. We completed the implementation in June with the university students.”

“We actually decided along with the village people when we chose this place and restored it. When women asked for a place, we saw that was the most appropriate one. Then we got the support of the Ministry of National Education. And the hub was created. Trainings of AÇEV had a great impact. I believe that women found themselves during these trainings. They felt that they existed, they were remembered and esteemed. And this gave them self-confidence and led to the creation of these hubs.”



Mustafa Aksoy
Former Principal, Ayvalı Village





What Does a Hub Mean for Women?



Zehra Geçit
Akin Village

“ I am 23. I got married at the age of 16 and had a child. I get up in the morning, have breakfast, send my children to school, then prepare lunch, wash dishes, do the cleaning... The same things every day... I go out to sit in front of our door at the very most. Everyone sits at home. I never wander around the village. No one does, where would we go? There is nowhere to visit or shop, anyway.”

Women like me sit at home but we need to open up. I wish they were more involved in the society, activities, or trainings that were held as we are mostly only middle school graduates. We got married at an early age so didn't go to school. It would be great if we could receive additional education. These hubs are really wonderful. I like the meeting room the most because it is great to come together and speak with the other women.”



Burcu Tombul
Akin Village

I feel happy at home. But these hubs are very important for socializing, to take a place within the society, and to feel relieved.



Gülsüm Deliođlan
Akin Village

Previously we didn't come together with the women of the village very often. We thought of creating a group in AÇEV when it came here. And we thought Modern Women would be a good name. We didn't have a place to come together and meet each other. We now have our place as Modern Women. We want to do embroidery. We all benefit from embroidery. Of course I feel better at home with my children. But being with others feels good, as well. I like it. I feel more motivated. I hear things from others. We get closer... Being in a community feels great.



Saliha Deliođlan
Akın Village

One of my children is studying at university in Tokat. I wish this hub had been opened earlier so my child could have studied there comfortably. It will be good for the children of the village. They will be able to do better because they don't have anywhere to study at home. Women's hubs should be only for women. Women should be able to act comfortably.



Semra Deliođlan
Akın Village

Community is a good thing. We've become more powerful. One feels stronger



Mine Aslan
Güryıldız Village

I am 24. I have a daughter. I am living with my mother-in-law and father-in-law. Sometimes I say it would be enough to have a corner for myself. I love reading books



4

The Cornerstones of These Hubs: Women



Future of the Women's Hubs

When AÇEV set out to create this project with the support of UNDP and Coca Cola two years ago, the most important thing they held on to was the women and their requests.

As time passed by, the village women became partners in the solution rather than being passive recipients of the projects. From finding the places to restoring and cleaning them, and deciding for the trainings, the village women were engaged in every stage and made decisions. By the time this book was being prepared, women in four villages of Tokat had their fully-equipped hubs complete with children's room, library, and computers where they could receive additional education as well as spend their time.

And the keys of these hubs are in the hands of women in every sense. They decide everything ranging from finding sources for heating, internet, and water to what kind of training to receive and how to use it. They will no doubt encounter some challenges as was the case in the past. They will handle it together. At this point, their motivation and sense of belonging will be more important. They will overcome these problems when they manage to act with solidarity.

AÇEV will visit the villages and meet the women three or four times a year. To continue with the trainings held in women's hubs, the activities of EÇE (Early Childhood Education) Platform, the university, and institutions in the province have been integrated into these hubs. Now, women know how they can access relevant institutions and services. It will be ensured that these women's hubs will remain the venue and the meeting point for all the activities to be held by all the institutions in the villages. Projects and cooperations will be developed to support the activities to be carried out in these hubs.

Women of Ayvalı, Gryıldız, Akın, and Ormandibi have already started their activities in their hubs, which was once only a distant dream for them. While some of them are attending computer courses and thinking about which courses to take next, others are thinking about how to make use of these trainings. As you see, women from the rural areas of Tokat have different concerns now. They don't only think about in which garden or farm they will work, but also how they will spread the seeds to their hubs.

“First of all, we want these hubs to be used efficiently. It is good that they have a function of socializing women, but it should provide a function for education as well. We want public institutions to come here and cooperate with the women to provide trainings, innovation, and income generating activities. Another important point is that we want preschool children to be able to benefit from these places. The contribution of these hubs to children’s development is very important for us.”



Hilal Kuşçul

Assistant General Manager, AÇEV



Gülsemin Akay

Field Coordinator, AÇEV

“When women start to talk about their problems, they will find the solutions themselves. Then they will learn to act themselves because they have already started questioning. Their access to resources will be easier. Institutions that become aware of the hubs will go there after us. No one in the village will have an excuse that there is no place for them to receive supplemental education. The husbands of the village will be more likely to give permission to their wives because these hubs are assigned to only women. I believe that women’s hubs will help women grow stronger in the villages.”

In a Word

“What does a wall do? Does it separate one place from another? Does it make you tell, ‘You are on that side and I am on this side’? If the wall is too big and if I cannot cross to the other side, then it is made to limit me. Because there are people who want me to stay where I am. If there is a door and a guard, it means that some people want to know who crosses to the other side. A wall is a border.

This is how Ursula Le Guin creates the relationship between a wall and a border in her book of *The Dispossessed*. Borders in the rural areas of Tokat and nearly all villages of Turkey are defined by visible or invisible walls. Walls of the school, the mosque, the coffee house, the gardens, village headman place and health care centers make up a village’s map. These walls become the borders for women. Reinforced by social judgments, these borders turn into obstacles and barriers against women in villages.

In this project, women first brought down the borders made of walls of bricks. Walls of the school, former municipality building or village headman place are no longer high and impassable walls of bricks in the village. Then, women built their own hubs behind the walls they passed through.

‘Hubs’ were not some kind of space to be filled, but came into ‘being’ with the symbols and meanings attributed to them. With these projects, women became the heroes of these hubs established in four villages of Tokat. And after this, WOMEN will continue to be the heroes of this story and become the cornerstones of these hubs. And years later, not only the stories of these walls, but also the stories of those women who made these walls will come to life and have their place in the story of these hubs. Just as *In a Word*...



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Resilient nations.

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