

## UNECE/FAO UNDA project local workshops in Armenia

October - November 2014

### I. Introduction

Republic of Armenia is a mountainous landlocked country located in South Caucasus. It is bordered to Turkey in the west, Georgia in the north, Azerbaijan in the east and Iran in the south. The area of the country is 29,743 km<sup>2</sup> and the population is 3,018,854 as of 2011. The country is divided into ten marzes (regions), while capital city of Yerevan has a status of a community. In 2013 the GDP of Armenia was USD 10,325,000,000 and GDP per capita was USD 3,037. Construction, services and agriculture are the most important sectors of Armenian economy. Cash remittances sent home by Armenians working abroad are another important contributor to the GDP.

Armenia has continental climate with dry and warm summers (temperatures fluctuate between 22-36 C<sup>0</sup>) and relatively cold and snowy winters (temperatures – between -10 and -5 C<sup>0</sup>). Springs are short and autumns are quite long. Due to topography of the country the climate significantly varies in different parts of the country and at different altitudes. Climate zones vary from dry subtropics in the southern and north-eastern parts of the country to mountain tundra at higher elevations. Average annual precipitation levels vary from 235 mm in Ararat valley to over 1,000 mm on Aragats Mountain.

Today forests cover about 11% (334.1 thousand ha) of the territory of Armenia; while historically the forest covered up to 40% of the territory of what is today the Republic of Armenia. Forests in Armenia are located extremely unevenly, with 62% of those located in the north-east, 36% in the south, and only 2% in the central parts of the country. Forests of the country are rich in biodiversity with 274 aboriginal trees and shrubs, including 25 endemic species. Main forest species are the beech, oak, hornbeam, and pine, which make 89.1% of forest cover and 97.2% of forest reserves.

By 1920s Armenia had about 20% forest cover, but during 20<sup>th</sup> century forests in Armenia have gone through three phases of overexploitation – during industrialization in 1920-30s, during WWII, as well as more recently during the energy crisis of early 1990s. As a result the forests have lost much of their economic and environmental reserves and value, leading to

loss of biodiversity and quality of stands. Illegal logging still remains a serious issue, though officially registered cases have significantly reduced since 2000s.

All forests of Armenia are owned by the state, except for small portion (up to 1,000 ha) planted by communities and NGOs in recent years. Management of forests is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture through “Hayantar” (Armforest) state non-commercial organization and its 20 forestry branches throughout the country, and the Ministry of Nature Protection through protected areas established on around 100 thousand ha of forest lands. The Forestry Code also provides the possibility of forest management by the communities if those wish so and are able to develop a management plan and get its approval from the Ministry of Agriculture. Up to date there have been developed such plans for 11 communities, but at the moment only two communities (Koghb and Jujevan villages in Tavush marz) manage forest with the support of donor organizations.

## **II. Profiles of participants**

Local workshops have been organized in four provinces of Armenia, including Syunik, Lori, Tavush and Kotayk. These have been held on October 30, November 7, 14 and 21, 2014, respectively. Participants from Vayots dzor province have been invited to Syunik workshop, but have not been able to participate due to snowing on the roads, while participants from Aragatsotn and Shirak provinces have participated in Kotayk workshop. 19 participants have been invited to Syunik workshop, 20 to Lori workshop, 24 to Tavush workshop and 23 to Kotayk workshop. Most of the invitees have been representatives of local branches of State Forestry Agency Hayantar, representatives of protected areas, local self-governance bodies, regional governments, civil society and businesses have also been invited. While invited representatives of Hayantar have mostly participated in the workshops, participation of other invitees has been less active, so the total number of participants in four workshops has been 60 (see the list of participants in the end of the document).

As in case of the national workshop, this time as well in parallel with the local workshops, there have been several other events related with forestry sector organized in the same regions. These have been held by the World Bank and the Ministry of Agriculture of Armenia

and have had negative impact on the level of participation in local workshops, as well as the willingness of participants to involve actively in the discussions due to tiredness.

### III. Summary of workshop discussions

Generally, participants of the local workshops have been less active than those of the national workshop. Nevertheless, according to feedback received from the participants they have been very happy with the possibility to openly share ideas and raise issues. During all local workshops the participants have been less active in the beginning, when they have been behaving as during the “traditional” workshops, during which they mostly listen, but once they have understood that these workshop has completely different format and they are expected to be as much of a trainer as a student, the situation has been changing.

In general, the participants of local workshops have been raising more issues related with field work, ones that have not been raised during the national workshop. They have been more critical about the situation in the forestry sector and more pessimistic about their ability to change anything. Except for Syunik workshop, during the rest of the workshops most of the discussions have been between representatives of Hayantar, who have been more informed and more interested in changes in the forestry sector. Representatives of NGOs have mostly been learning and asking questions.

### IV. Overview of exercises

Unlike the participants of the national workshops, the participants of local ones have been more interested in learning about various uses of wood for heating purposes, such as pellet fuel, briquettes, etc. Thus substantial amount of time has been dedicated to these, leaving less time for exercises. Nevertheless, the interest in participatory methods and respective exercises has also been high. During all four local workshops the same set of exercises has been used, including *Quick assessment method*, *Method for participatory review of policies and strategies*, *Problem analysis procedure*, *Rights, revenues and responsibilities analysis procedure*, *SWOT analysis*, *Stakeholder mapping*, *Data gaps identification exercise* and the *Fish bowl*. Below are presented details regarding some of the exercises:

- *Quick assessment method* – participants in Syunik have been the most critical regarding the forestry sector if judged by this method. None of the issues has received the two highest grades of 4 and 5, while only two issues have received 3. Majority of the issues have received the lowest grade of 1. Lori workshop participants have been less critical than those in Syunik and their grades have been distributed more evenly, though none of the issues has received the highest grade of 5. Generally, the participants of Tavush and Kotayk workshops have also assessed the situation in forestry sector less critically, than in Syunik, and the issue of sustainable production and consumption of forestry products has even received the highest grade. This must be due to not noticing the word “sustainable” in the phrase by the participants.
- *Rights, revenues and responsibilities analysis procedure* – the exercise has shown quite interesting results during all of the local workshops, especially Lori and Tavush, where the participants have come to conclusion that the communities do not have any rights related with the forests, but surprisingly decided that this does not need to change in the ideal situation as well. According to participants the management of the forests has to be implemented only by professionals and local population has nothing to do with that. This can probably be explained by the prevalence of foresters in the groups. All of the groups have been very critical regarding the responsibilities of the local communities, claiming that the communities are not motivated to participate in the management of the forests at all. Nevertheless during follow-up discussions all of the groups acknowledged that in communities where foresters have better relationship with the local population the latter shows more readiness to help with forest management, specifically fighting wildfires.
- *Stakeholder mapping* – the exercise has been used in parallel with the previous one and again the results have been almost the same in all provinces. The groups believed that the government and its agencies have the highest level of influence and the lowest level of affectedness, while in case of the population and communities the situation has been the opposite. Interestingly, none of the groups has identified international organizations as a stakeholder, probably since in provinces they deal more with the government and the population. Most of the

groups have been cautious when deciding how shall the levels of influence and affectedness of stakeholders change in order to improve the situation in the forestry sector, but the group in Kotayk has decided in the end that all of the stakeholders have to be equally influential and affected.

- *Fish bowl* – the exercise has been praised by most of the participants thanks to being the most open one allowing everyone to present their ideas and recommendations. Still, it has not been as useful as during the national workshop. There are two main reasons for this and those are the following. First, it has been difficult for the participants to fit into their roles and they have constantly been trying to return to the reality, running away from Middlestan. And though this may be useful for raising actual problems and analyzing those, this has also proved to be difficult, since the majority of participants has had the same opinion regarding the situation with the firewood use in Armenia and have been coming to the same conclusion after few comments. Everyone agreed that the local population needs the wood for cooking and heating purposes and no one can stop them from harvesting wood unless an alternative is provided. They also agreed that if current trends continue the forests may completely lose their current value and that transition to more sustainable management is needed.

## **V. Challenges**

- Challenges related with the local workshops have mostly been related with the organizational side of those. One of the main challenges has been low level of participation in the workshop. Most of the workshop participants needed to travel from distant locations and since the workshops have a one-day event, many invitees have chosen not to attend despite initially confirming their participation.
- Another serious issue during all of the local workshops has been lack of interest and enthusiasm in the beginning of the workshops, when participants have been expecting a standard lecture-student format they have been used to. The first reaction of many participants to the unusual standard has been skepticism and complaining regarding the need to do “childish” things (for instance, in case of introduction format). To address this it has been decided to change some details of

the workshops and focusing more on exercises and provision of information regarding new technologies related with sustainable forest management and various uses of wood. Also there have been more discussions based on personal experiences of participants with regards to advantages of participatory and transparent decision-making processes. Hayantar has also been asked to make sure representatives from Yerevan have been present at the workshops to maintain the discipline among participants.

- Issues observed during the national workshop, such as constant need to explain and remind participants that the objective of the workshop has been studying of participatory methods necessary for development of green economy plan for the forestry sector and not the development of the plan itself, as well as the domination of some of the better informed and educated participants, have been observed during the local workshops as well.

## **VI. Conclusions and recommendations**

The workshops conducted in regions have reached the objective of increasing the level of understanding of participatory planning methods and sustainable forest management among the participants. Below are presented various issues raised by the workshop participants and their recommendations regarding the forestry sector:

- Lack of communication between the foresters and protected areas' rangers working in the field and local population. Despite the fact that most of foresters and rangers live in the same communities, they are not able to maintain proper level of contact with local population due to various factors, such as lack of time, lack of understanding of the importance of such contacts, etc.
- Most of the participants representing Hayantar SNCO mentioned the low quality of forestry maps used for forest management planning purposes. In many cases foresters find out that either forest plots planned for harvesting are too steep or there are no trees ready for harvesting. This leads to need for logging in areas where no logging is planned for given year and respective violations. Also, the maps are not readable for the foresters and look more like schemes. Perhaps, there is need for training of foresters in these regards.

- Foresters mention that currently there is very active natural regrowth in most of the forests and if investments are made into proper security measures, mostly limiting the grazing, the forests will be able to recover, especially at higher elevations.
- There are no proper fire and pest control mechanisms such as temporary firefighting groups that existed in the Soviet period. Many of the participants expected that this will become a more serious issue with the increasing temperatures related to climate change. They already observe a lower level of precipitations, especially in the winter.
- Since many of the forests are not attractive anymore from a timber production perspective due to intensive logging during previous years, some of the participants suggested developing hunting as an alternative source of income for the forest enterprises. They mention that this will also help restoring fauna through better controlled hunting, whereas nowadays poachers and “uneducated” hunters kill animals without proper control. While previously forest enterprises have had gamekeepers who have been responsible for the regulation of hunting, recently most of them have been fired to save funds. On the other hand, poor management practices lead to a lack of food for wolves, which in return go to the villages and kill cattle.
- Foresters find it difficult to apply penalties on their neighbors due to personal relationships and high levels of penalties. According to foresters, the penalties are so high that applying those on locals means leaving them without means for survival. They suggest reducing the penalties, as well as motivating foresters to apply those through the provision of some percentage of money collected through penalties to foresters. Currently, according to them, the penalties go to the budget and are not used for forestry needs.
- According to many of the participants, the current practice of logging by the buyers has to be discontinued and all wood has to be harvested by the forestry agency, which can later sell the wood in the communities. This will improve the quality of logging since with current practices, foresters cannot control all buyers, while in case they are responsible for logging, it will become better organized.
- Forest-related discussions are mostly focused on forest cover, while the quality of forests is also serious. On the other hand, forest management plans classify species

as more and less important, while from the environmental perspective all species are equally important and necessary. Forest management plans are mostly focused on the economic side of the sector ignoring social and environmental aspects.

- It is recommended to invest into energy-efficient wood stoves, as well as thermo-insulation of the houses in order to reduce pressure on the forests. In general there is need for introduction of modern technologies in the forestry sector to make forest management more effective. Another recommendation related with reduction of pressure on forests is promotion of wood processing where it is possible. In many cases wood, that can be processed and sold for a price exceeding the firewood price tenfold, is burned, because when locals buy a license for harvesting of firewood they cannot use the harvested wood for any other purpose but burning regardless of the quality of the wood. As an alternative the wood may be processed and sold for higher price, then the higher incomes may be used for buying of gas and investing into better forest management, including intensive reforestation. Also, the wood used for heating purposes can be turned into pellets or briquettes, thus increasing the efficiency, as well as simply dried.
- The issue of security of foresters has been raised during all workshops. This includes both social and physical security. The salaries of the foresters are very low if compared with the work they do, which is virtually 24/7, especially in the fall, when illegal logging becomes more intensive. The level of technical equipping of foresters is very low; they neither have weapons, nor vehicles, nor even horses in many cases. Foresters mention that they are not protected against predators and weapons are needed mostly for that purpose.
- Different approaches are needed in different parts of Armenia with completely different situation in forestry. While Lori and Tavush are rich in terms of forest resources, with Syunik close to these, the other provinces cannot compete with them, since their forests are either planted more recently or too small, thus no income generation is possible yet.
- Finally, foresters from the central provinces suggest using abandoned agricultural lands for reforestation purposes. Given the lack of land in the central parts of the country it is not wise to leave lands unused, while forest enterprises often do not

have land for reforestation or the available lands require much larger investments than abandoned agricultural lands.

## VII. List of participants

N	Name	Organization	Position	Mobile	E-mail
<b><i>Syunik workshop</i></b>					
1	Anahit Amaryan	Hayantar SNCO Syunik branch	HR		
2	Andranik Hayrapetyan	Hayantar SNCO Kapan branch	Forester	093 189 116	
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8	Razmik Stepanyan	"Shikahogh" State Reserve	Inspector	094 222 076	
9	Ruben Mkrtchyan	"Shikahogh" State Reserve	Director	094 222 122	
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<b><i>Lori workshop</i></b>					
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21	Gurgen Dvoyan	Hayantar SNCO Gugark branch	Engineer	093 312 253	
22	Karen Hovhannisyan	Hayantar SNCO Tashir branch	Engineer	077 752 504	
23	Karo Ayyvazyan	Hayantar SNCO Dsegh branch	Senior Forester	093 198 833	
24	Levon Kirakosyan	Hayantar SNCO Jiliza branch	Senior Forester	091 345 277	
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<b><i>Tavush workshop</i></b>					

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