



# **KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTION OF PEOPLE LIVING IN COMMUNITIES ADJACENT TO FORESTS**

**(Report on Survey Findings)**

**“Hazarashen” Armenian Center for Ethnological Studies**

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## ***Introduction***

In March-April 2010, within the framework of Improving Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) in Eastern European Neighborhood Policy Countries and Russia project, a survey was carried out in eight settlements of Armenia neighbouring forests. The aim of the survey was to reveal the knowledge, attitudes and perception of the population of the abovementioned settlements with regard to forest preservation and conservation issues. In particular it was aimed to find out to what extent the population was familiar with forest management and the functions of the forest, as well as the level of concern and commitment of the population with respect to the forest and its factual attitude, problems of legal and illegal forest logging, their perception of the extent to which the population can have an impact on the forest, awareness of forest preservation activities and their real concerns and their understanding of groups that are responsible for the forest. Yet another goal of the survey was to figure out what the sources of environmental knowledge are for the population and which are the most optimal ways of distributing this information among the population are.

The survey was carried out by the “Hazarashen” Armenian Center for Ethnological Studies NGO under the supervision of H. Kharatyan. The survey was based exclusively on the qualitative method through focus group discussions. Observations and a number of individual interviews were also carried out. The focus groups were formed and the discussions were organized by four researchers: Ara Goulyan, Zarouhi Hambardzoumyan, Shoushanik Saratikyan and Rouzan Manoucharyan. In four out of eight settlements that were selected in advance, namely in Kapan, Dilijan, Berd and Shnogh the leader of the study H. Kharatayn also participated in the process of the study and focus group discussions. The analysis and the current report have been realized and prepared by H.Kharatyan.

The field study has been carried out in eight settlements of three regions /marzes/ of Armenia: The selection was done based on the criteria of the working plan suggested by IUCN CPC: one city, two towns, two large villages and three small villages. Besides the sizes of the settlements another basis for the selection was data on illegal forest logging, as well as the status of the forests neighboring the settlements / besides, the territories of “Hayantar” settlements neighboring forests with a status of a “National Park” or a “Reserve Forest” have been selected/, the existence/absence of forest related enterprises in the settlements. Accessibility of mass media /settlements with high, middle and low access have been chosen/, differences in standards of living and the tourism potential of the settlements were also taken into consideration. The presence/absence of natural gas supply as an alternative source of heating was also taken into consideration. As a result the study was carried out in the following settlements:

**Table 1: Selected settlements and selection principle**

#	<i>Settlement</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Status of the neighboring forest</i>	<i>Illegal logging</i>	<i>The level of Mass media accessibility</i>	<i>Tourism and tourism potential</i>	<i>Standards of living of the population</i>	<i>Natural gas availability</i>	<i>Availability of forest related enterprises</i>
1	Kapan	City	Hayantar	Present	Two local TV channels, main media outlets are accessible	Is on the ways of touristic routs	Middle based on Armenian criteria	Available	Available
2	Shikahogh	Small village	Reserve forest	Present	There is a satellite connection, “Shant TV” is accessible	Doesn’t have	Poor	N/A	N/A
3	Artsvanik	Small village	Hayantar	Present	Very low	Doesn’t have	Poor		N/A
4	Dilijan	City	National Park	Present	Main media outlets are accessible	Is a tourist city	Middle based on Armenian criteria	Available	Available
5	Gosh	Small village	National park	Present	Main media outlets are accessible	Is a tourist village	Poor	N/A	N/A
6	Azatamout	Large village	Hayantar	Present	Main media outlets are accessible	Doesn’t have	Poor	Available	N/A
7	Berd	Urbanized village	Hayantar	Present	Main media outlets are accessible	Doesn’t have	Poor	Available	N/A
8	Shnogh	Large village	Hayantar	Present	Main media outlets are accessible	Doesn’t have	Middle based on Armenian criteria	Available	N/A

In all the settlements three focus group discussions were carried out, i.e. men, women and leaders. Overall 24 discussions were held with altogether 133 participants, including 82 men, 51 women. The focus groups consisted of four to six participants, only in Azatamout and Berd women's focus groups were larger with nine and seven participants respectively. The age group of the focus groups was from 30 to 60, in some cases the participants were younger or older. The participants of women's focus groups were mainly housewives, in Berd also an employee of the local administration, a teacher, and NGO representative. In Dilijan the focus group of women comprised exclusively hired employees. The so called "leaders" groups included village mayors, employees of the National Park of Armenia, doctors, environmentalists, teachers, members of the Council of the Elder, businessman, including those who deal with timber business, a banker, an executive of a hotel, a judge, NGO leaders, members etc.

**Table 2: Number of participants per group and settlement**

#	<i>Town/village</i>	<i>Leaders</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
1	Kapan city	5	6	6
2	Shikahogh village	4	6	6
3	Artsvanik village	5	6	5
4	Dilijan city	5	5	5
5	Gosh village	6	5	5
6	Azatamout village	5	9	5
7	Berd urban settlement	6	7	4
8	Shnogh large village	5	6	6
	Total:	41	50	42

The analysis of materials reveals the following picture.

### ***Theme 1: Knowledge, attitude and practices applied to the forest and its utilization***

#### **The status of forests neighboring the settlements under study**

In Armenia there is no other form of forest ownership than state ownership and all the participants of the discussions were aware of that. The participants of the discussions not always could clearly define the owner of the forest, in their responses most of the time they were mentioning the forest management institution: „The forest is the forestry, isn't it?” „It is the forestry and the state probably is supervising to some extent.” „The owner of the forest is the forestry,” sometimes they would say „The forest belongs to the people.” Very few of them know the name „Hayantar,” but when our researchers were using it they could understand that it is the equivalent of the word „forestry” they were using. News spread among the population that some parts of the forest were privatized or were sold to individuals

as private property. In the South of Syunik region and in particular in Artsvanik village people thought that this was the case with the forests in the North and in particular in Vanadzor, whereas in the North and particularly in Berd people said that the forests of Tsakhkadzor had been privatized and logged in order to build recreation zones and hotels as a result of which the function of the forest had drastically changed. In Dilijan as an example of a privatized forest people mentioned the part of the forests, which was neighboring the town and which as the residents believes were privatized for construction by high ranking officials from Yerevan, who fenced the area, built their villas hindering the access of the residents to the forest. In Berd men focus group, which consisted exclusively of local businessmen the participants were convinced that a certain part of the forest that spread near their settlement was bought and completely deforested by some individuals. Their conviction was based on the phenomena that some unknown people have built a road to that part of the forest by which cut trees or to be more precise timber was being transported on trucks. Other people can't drive on that road, they are not allowed. As we were told a special civilian security service overlooks the road and wouldn't allow anyone approach the deforested area. The participants of the focus group, and later the focus group of Berd „leaders” insisted that everybody knew who was the owner of that area and considered it a private property, although avoiding mentioning any names. According to our respondents only employees of the forestry /meaning „Hayantar/ can enter the area and the forester himself is overlooking the logging, however this control is directed not towards those who cut the trees but towards protecting the latter from the curiosity of the residents. All our efforts to meet the head of the corresponding department of „Hayantar” in Tavush Marz, or any of the foresters of Berd were in vain. Later in Yerevan the head of „Hayantar” confirmed that in Armenia none of the forests or parts of it is private and that in case any part of the forest is used for the reason of creating a recreation zone or construction then that part of the forest changes its status and is no more considered a forest. The residents were totally unfamiliar with the phenomena that the forest can have a status of a community property and therefore a significant part of our discussions was devoted to that. In Armenia there are no forest zones with a status of a community property.

The residents have a very vague understanding of the subordination, structure and function of „Hayantar” /or as they put it „the forestry”/ „Reserve forest” and „National Park.” The generalized perception of discussion participants can be summed up through the following expressions: “The forestry controls that the forest of a certain territory and the neighborhood of the forest is clean, the trees are not cut”, „Reserve forest is the place where people and domestic animals are not allowed to enter” and “the national park has a preservation nature, there are separate birch areas, some burrs or plants and types of trees that are in the Red Book; their task is to preserve all that.” However not always do the residents know the status of the neighboring forest. In Dilijan, for example where the forest that once had a status of a reserve forest now has changed into a National park part of the population and especially women were confused in defining the status of “their forest” and who is overlooking the forest. They did not know whether it was the forestry, the reserve forest or the National park at the same time some of them did not discern the difference between these three; „Honestly speaking, I don't know,” „I don't know; when I find out I'll tell.”

### 1. Forest utilization and realizing the benefits of the forest

Various discussions concerning benefits of forest utilization took place in all the settlements and in all focus groups. Basically it can be said that men and women differ in the way they see forest utilization and its usefulness; however after the discussion very often their summaries are identical.

In all the settlements under study both urban and rural residents make use of the forests' material products from almost the beginning of spring up to the late fall. The variety of forest berries, types of fruit and wild greens is rather impressive:

- Mushrooms, dewberry, current, rose hip, raspberry
- Cornel, pear, plum, sometimes` apples, medler, haw,
- Asparagus, type of a fennel, type of a spinach, mallow, nettle, sorrel, khazaz /resembling garlic/, khnjloz /resembling onions/ etc.
- Walnut, hazelnut, emmer wheat, acorn, emmer wheat grows in the northern forests /Tavush,Lori/ and walnuts in the southern /Syunik/.

Herbs: The majority of the residents know very well which of the plants in the surrounding forests are herbs and for what they can be used / gastrointestinal diseases, analgesics, anti-inflammatory, to cure hypertension etc. /. They list the variety of herbs in great detail together with instructions on how to use them.

Wild greens, berries, fruit are used both for everyday needs and are preserved for winter through sealing in food jars, preparing jams, stewed fruit, preserves, drying (cornel, pear), pickles (especially from lilies). From most of the fruits fruit vodka and *pasteghs* (*sour lavash*) are prepared. The poorest part of the population sells forest products. Among the settlements under study this is especially widespread in Azatamout and Berd settlements of Tavush Marz, in Kapan, to some extent also in Shnogh village of Lori Marz. However this is practiced if the settlement is large or if it is located on busy roadways or if it is close to the cities. In Shikahogh village of Syunik Marz, where the forests are rich with edible plants and fruit / fennel, cornel, berries, different types of edible wild greens resembling asparagus, fennel, onions, garlic etc (*azazil, gandzak, shrish, khlopoz, kachap etc.*) /, in fact there is no trade as they are very isolated. There is so much dewberry that the residents of the village make wine from it, sometimes up to three-five hundred liters. However the majority of the village population is the elder as young people have left the village. People tell that the wealth of their forests most of the time remains in the forest. „We gather medlar from the forest, here I have also gathered some, we dry it and make stewed fruit, they say medlar is a medicine for hypertension, if there is someone who needs it I gather and give it out, I have dried 13 kg, if here is someone who wants I can give, it just stays there uselessly, I have gathered 60 kg of rose hip and dried it, again it remains here without being used, I have sent some to a person in Ghapan to barter it, to take it to that factory of stewed fruit and juices, but they didn't take it to the factory. We collect walnut, wild greens, sometimes there are wild apples, we gather it and make vodka, we also gather cornelian cherries again we make vodka from it and also stewed fruit, we cook preserves, some years we also have hazelnut/acorn, and we gather it for the cattle.”

The forest is also often used as a hay field to store animal feed for winter. In the areas with limited lands some people use the wood clearings to sow potatoes, beans and cabbage.

In many places the forest is also used as a pasture for the cattle, at the same time if in case of cattle there is always someone who is watching the animals so that they don't damage the branches and seedlings, the pigs during the whole season /July October/ are kept in the forest to eat acorn and emmer wheat. Keeping the pigs in the forest is widely spread especially in the North of Armenia, i.e. Tavush and Lori Marzes, where the forests are rich with acorn and emmer wheat.

The forest also serves as a recreation zone, especially by young people. In the North it is also a place to celebrate national holidays /in Tavush and Lori summer time festivities of Vardavar are celebrated in the forest zone/.

Another function that the forest has is the aesthetic education; schools organize excursions in the forest.

In some settlements, e.g. Gosh, Azatamout, Berd they say that during the war the forest saved the people from starvation and freezing to death.

To enter the forest, have a rest their, make use of the forest goods is absolutely free, without any limitations. "It is free, no one forbids, all that mushrooms, berries, everybody uses that , dewberry or whatever it is, no one says anything, but when it comes to cutting the trees they do forbid"- Azatamout. Not only cutting the trees is forbidden, but also gathering wood wastes without a special permission.

However, in the settlements neighboring forests with a status of a reserve forest or a national park there are certain limitations to using forest goods. First of all it is not allowed to let the cattle enter the forest. In Gosh village however it is a quite serious problem that is under discussion throughout the recent years. The pastures of Gosh village are not attached to the village but are separated by a reserve forest. The villagers have no other way of getting to the pastures than through the reserve- forest. This permanently causes arguments and complaints. In fact without clearly understanding the necessity of turning their forest into a reserve forest the villagers at the same time find that however important is the forest it can not be more important than the people and through the protection of the forest people should not be deprived of the resources, in this case from access to pastures. Secondly if the forest has a status of a reserve forest or of a national park this limits the access of the people to the forest. „At this time of spring not a single guard of the forestry or director, or whoever it is will allow to enter the forest and our people obey them. Because, we say it is time for the dears to fawn. They don't go to the forest not to disturb the dears, maybe it is giving birth at that very moment, like humans, the same are the beasts, so that it doesn't run away in the middle of fawning.” In Shikahogh villagers bitterly joked that they are not allowed even to laugh out loudly in their own village or to listen to the music „because you know, the panther will have a miscarriage, the wolf will be scared off.” In the men's focus group of Dilijan the participants complained of a different thing. The parts of the forest surrounding the town of Dilijan according to the residents of the town were privatized and fenced by high ranking officials from Yerevan. Thus the access pf the population to the forest was significantly limited. Even in order to organize an outing in the forest people now have to go much further and deeper in the forest.

Forest goods are of vital importance especially for the population of poorer settlements. For one of the studied settlements Azatamout, which during the USSR period was established for the workers involved in bentonite production, and doesn't have agricultural lands and where cattle breeding is very difficult /people live in blocks of flats, have no room for cattle shed, neither do they have a place to store winter feed/ the forest is an extremely important source of income. People in Azatamout acutely feel the consequences of tree logging of the last twenty years. „Because of those tree loggings that were done during the hard years the forest has thinned out even more, the forest is not accessible for everyone anymore, it is very difficult now. The roads are not good in many sectors and we face difficulties in bringing the harvest from the forest.” Residents of Berd have similar problems; as a result of the forest logging of the last twenty years the forest has now „moved away” from the settlement and people, especially the elder get there with great difficulty.

The forest is of course also used for firewood, which is considered the most significant benefit of the forest. All the other benefits of the forest based on the results of all focus groups are incomparable with its main benefit- firewood. As a matter of course in the settlements neighboring the forests it is first of all perceived as a source of firewood. All the residents insisted that firewood was not the logged tree, but the fallen and dried tree or the branches of an already cut tree- the wastes. The residents pay for this most important forest product and for most of them it is unacceptable and incomprehensible why they should pay for gathering forest wastes. They believe that by gathering the wood wastes and the fallen trees they clean the forest and thus the forest benefits. They also believe that by doing that to a certain extent they are doing the job of „Hayantar.” Such an approach was partially shaped in the Soviet period: “The wind blows, breaks, crushes and cuts everything. Under the communists the people would get paid to go and clean the forest, bring that wood and burn it, to open the field, the roads, so that it is clean, so that in case of a fire there is a rout for the people to go and put it down. Now it is absolutely impossible, all that has vanished.” /Shikahogh, men; Gosh, men). The villagers find that now the number of forest related people and institutions has grown and that neither the forest, nor the population or the State benefit from that: “In the past the state had only one thing- one forestry. Now there is environmental protection, there is the forestry, there is a reserve forest, all these special plant things<sup>1</sup>, all of them have their own workshop<sup>2</sup>, this is your workshop, that is mine, they have set up them and are working. The State gives the Budget out and helps people survive...” /Shikahogh, men /.

It is noteworthy that none of the participants of the discussions knew for sure where the decision was concerning the payment against collecting the forest wastes made and in fact what was the price per one cubic meter of forest wastes. For the residents the main source of forest related information is forest guards, and sometimes foresters if people are personally familiar with the latter. In fact most of the time people are familiar with the forest guard and therefore ask him for a permission to gather forest wastes.

In different settlements the perception of the residents of the value of forest wastes and the volume that they are allowed to gather is different. The amount that is mentioned most often is two cubic meters. No one has seen a document which would define the right to gather and use

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<sup>1</sup> Here plant protection groups are meant.

<sup>2</sup> By using the word “workshop” the narrator means „production plants” and by saying this he is hinting that all the mentioned structures are means of making money, partially on the account of the salaries that they get from the state, as well as through embezzling money from the population.



forest wastes or firewood together with the permitted amount and prices. Women more rarely, men most of the time now that to get the permission to gather forest wastes they must make a payment at the local branch of the forestry/ they mean „Hayantar”/. The real experience sometimes is perceived as a right. In those rural settlements which are far from the local office of „Hayantar” often the problems are solved through the forester: he is selling the „document” himself, he pays for the amount agreed on and gives the document permitting the gathering of forest wastes to the villager.

The price for forest wastes substantially varies from one settlement to another: from 1200 AMD to 3000 AMD. As Shikahogh women focus group knows „He comes, writes out the receipt, says, you must pay 6000 rubles to the forestry, if you don't have give half of it now and the rest you'll pay later. I have the right to go to the forest and gather dried wood from their but not wet wood. But there is no dry wood, so it is difficult for us. Besides, it is so far away. We are to pay 6000 AMD to bring the wood, but against that 6000 we are allowed to gather only 2 meters of wastes, scattered in the forest, rotten, dry wood. Do you think a villager can make it with those 2 meters one complete year?” Again in Shikahogh the men spoke of a different price „3 cubic meters with the current prices cost 5400 AMD” /i.e. one cubic meter costs 1800 AMD-H.KH./.

In Kapan they said that „ Per one quarter the receipt equals 4 500 AMD, but now they have increased the price. Now it makes 18 thousand per one year. One needs to cover 18000 AMD annually. After that, when we go to gather wood we need to pay here again. Twelve thousand, sixteen thousand, it depends: and then you bring 3 -4 cubic meters of wood. From the fallen, dry trees. It lasts for 2-3 months. You can't bring more, there are no convenient vehicles. We bring it on „Belarus.” Thus for the wastes that will last one year you in fact pay 18000 AMD, you go to the forest for 3-4 times, every time you pay 12-16 thousand for the car, so eventually every year you spend around 60 000 to bring it and 18000 for the firewood. If you can, you have the right to bring altogether at once, it is cheaper. But at that moment you either don't have money, or there is no car... But it's Ok, this way is also convenient” /Kapan, men /. In Gosh and Dilijan the cost of one cubic meter of wood wastes is 2500 AMD. „The wastes are 2400 AMD, if they are just scattered around and you only gather those, but if it is a standing tree and the forester says you can cut it, and then it is 4800 AMD per cubic meter. And this also depends on the type of the tree” /Gosh, leaders/. ”In Azatamout it is 2000 AMD. In Berd they complained that with the forest “moving away” from the settlement it has become more difficult for the people to gather and bring the wastes. Berd population is poor and most of them can not afford paying for the wastes sold by “Hayantar,” which as they think “should cost around 7000 AMD” /Berd, women /. Some fifteen years ago „there were people who would bring the firewood for the whole year on their backs, they would go to the forest everyday, of course they had back pain, but they were solving their everyday living problems. Since 97, 98 the wood has started to be used for industrial use and at a very large scale, the forest has thinned out and moved away. Now to gather wood waste one needs to go far away and it's no more possible to carry it on the ones back. Now, during these recent years that territory is far away as the forest itself „moved away”, and the expenses for tree logging have grown, here it is already quite a big sum of money, an the income generated from the forest has decreased, and the wood is more expensive.” /Berd, leaders/.

The forester who gives permission to gather wood wastes decides himself where they should be collected from: „ The foresters tell the people to bring the wood wastes from the far parts of the

forest, so the people get the wood wastes from the gorges... Eventually is costs very expensive, /Gosh, leaders/.

No one knows where the prices are established.<sup>3</sup> The forester announces the prices for wood. No one ever has seen a document indicating the price for wood or wood wastes. Instead in all the settlements people know how to acquire the necessary amount of firewood and at what price: „ I know the mechanism of how it works, the forester comes, if the *abeshik* /the chief forester-H.KH./ says, bro, give me 10000, go get your 20 meters but you still must pay for 5 cubic meters” /Shikahogh, leaders/. The same logics applies when it comes to local businessmen or craftsmen who deal with wood processing /Shnogh, Berd, men/. They always have a fresh permission to log two-three cubic meters of wood at hand.

„Hayantar” local offices offer workers and cars to transport the waste wood from the forest to their homes. However the residents find that that service is much more expensive than if they organize the transportation themselves. Some make use of relative-neighbor resources, help each other to upload and download the wood, hire cheaper cars or even pack animals.

Another option to acquiring firewood is the wood logged and stored by „Hayantar”, which according to the participants of focus groups, is sold at a very expensive price for the residents: „„Hayantar” cuts the wood, takes it away, stores and then tells us: come, buy it at a high price, take it and burn it ... We have no means for that, to pay 10000 AMD per one cubic meter. If I pay I can’t feed my child” /Shikahogh, men/. “Come, pay and take as much firewood as you want. But you still need to pay for the transportation, car fuel. We need 20 cubic meters of firewood annually, how shall we pay that much?” /Shikahogh, women; Shnogh, men/ “They go and bring six cubic meters of firewood on their backs, don’t you take that into account? What about their health?”. “Do you know how much that ten cubic meters of firewood that he gets to his door cost him?” “Do you know how many of our residents have back pains? Let’s see, how many people here in this room have back pains?” /Gosh, men/.

People who have acquired a permission to get wood wastes and have paid for that in practice very rarely limit themselves solely to gathering the wastes. Below is a fragment from a focus group conversation, which is very typical:

- Do you bring wood from the forest?
- Yes, I gather it.
- Third man. – We cut the trees, that is what we do.
- I don’t.
- You don’t but the majority does cut.

It is noteworthy that mainly men were talking about forest logging. Women never confessed that the trees were being cut, just the opposite, they cheerfully spoke for the decision that forbade forest logging. At the same time it was mainly in women’s focus groups that the tricks applied by the population to conceal forest logging were being „detected.” On the other hand it was again in women’s focus groups that the participants expressed discontent with regard to the people who were selling firewood in the cities, and the discontent referred not to the fact that the forests were logged, but to the diversification in the right to cut the trees. Their complaints were caused by the

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<sup>3</sup> The director of “Hayantar” informed us that the price for wood wastes was the same everywhere, i.e. 1000 AMD per 1 cubic meter plus 200AMD of VAT.

occurrence that some people are allowed to log the forest for trade, and the residents were not allowed to do that even to heat their homes.

In Kapan we met a person who was occupied in firewood trade. In reality this person goes to the far parts of the forest on foot and finds fallen trees: „Well now it takes me four hours to get to the part of the forest I need, I find a 4-5 meter long tree... I always look for a dry one, of this width-about 30 cm, but it must be a fallen one. So that they don't get hold of me and say you went to the forest and cut a wet tree /it might be that he also cuts healthy trees, because people who have bought firewood from him have bought wet/humid firewood. / There is such a thing that is specially made I put on it then I put it around my neck, well it is a slope here it is easy, so I come back pulling it behind me. To bring one cubic meter I go to the forest for five times. Well, I bring a meter a week. If I go everyday, all the time. It is not brushwood, real wood it is. Hornbeams cut and ready to be burnt. It is a heavy wood. In winter firewood is expensive: 10000 AMD for one cubic meter. It is a hard job; I have a thrombus in my left leg. It is a heavy load, when you pull it the vein might explode. Often I stop to have a rest, if I don't my leg wouldn't move. It is a heavy rise, like this.”

In Any case for all the settlements neighboring the forest firewood continues to remain the most important resource of the forest, and theoretically people are ready to refuse the rest of forest goods for the sake of firewood.

*2. Are people aware of environmental benefits of the forest? Soil stabilization, biodiversity, anti desertification, a protective shield against wind and dust, source of water, oxygen etc., etc.*

In all focus groups the participants to some extent were familiar with the functions of the forest. As knowledge acquired from literature and education the awareness was less and fragmented, but as a personal experience- the awareness was higher and comparatively identical.

Probably it can be said that participants of focus groups, except for separate cases, were more familiar with global climate changes than with the problems that their settlements and Armenia face. The village mayor of Gosh in the presence of focus group participants listed „If the forest doesn't exist, then there will be less water, the layer protecting the environment becomes smaller, water springs decrease in number, the winds become stronger, the floods become more damaging... The forest protects from many problems.”

One of the village mayors described the problems of their forest in the focus group: „springs of water decrease in number, already there are few; in the territories where there was a natural disaster or say forest logging area, there the number of the springs has decreased. There are more winds now and it is natural, with the forests diminishing there are more winds. And as there are more winds the same forest is threatened. The storms have damaged 20 hectares of the area, these storms just in a couple of minutes have crushed the whole area, and that was because the forest has thinned out, it's cut down all over.”

The same phenomena were discussed in the focus group of Berd „leaders” and all the participants have agreed that «Just look what is happening, it is already visible, in the recent 5-6 years strong winds have appeared in Shamshadin, this is something that never existed here neither at our grandfathers times, nor when, say, we were kids. This happens in spring, even sometimes in winter and those winds fall down the trees...When hectares of the forest are logged this way, deforestation leads to thinning out of the forest opening a way for the winds. The more

the forest thins out the stronger become the winds. And this we can see now with our own eyes. In the recent two years even quite a number of people were harmed by the winds, the roofs of their homes were torn away. Besides, the regimes of the three rivers that run across our area have changed and this is not only because of the global climate changes, but also because of local changes, because of forest logging. The causes of these changes are global but our local phenomena, the forest logging have added up to that. Because of forest logging the water passes as a surface flow and doesn't stay in the forest. Well there is a layer which plays a role of a sponge. That layer here used to be quite thick; when as children we were going to the forest, once you were putting your foot it was amortized, and it was always humid, humus was generated there under that layer. This layer does not exist anymore as the forest has thinned out, the leave layer does not generate the other layer anymore. Added to this is the road that was built for the cars to take away the wood. It is clear that when roads are built everywhere in the process the flow of underground waters is disrupted, when they dig the soil say 2-3 meters deep, that is to say they cut the forest flow of water, it flows out on the road and thus the process of subsidence begins. In addition there is also the factor of cattle pasturing, because of forest logging the greening begins and the cattle starts to pasture. In the past plants were not growing under the hills so that they can pasture, there was some vegetation but it was not fit for cows and sheep. Now the cattle enter the forest, well in addition there are the rains, drying and with the cattle trampling the soil it starts to decay... When our population leaves Shamshadin, they instinctively feel that the natural habitat is destroying, and they look for new means of living."

One of the participants of Berd „leaders" focus group was a doctor. During the discussion of this issue he added that because of river decrease and pollution hepatitis and contiguous enteric infections, especially dysentery have spread.

One of the participants of the men focus group in Berd spoke with a heavy heart about the trees cut on the slope and in great detail described the soil protective function of tree roots.

„What is good about the forest is that it protects from floods... The forest inhales oxygen and exhales carbon dioxide, this is the first benefit, and then the trees give as much water as they take... It is warm in the forest..." /Artsvanik, men/. After the discussion in Kapan women concluded that „Ecology, waters... I think eventually it will turn into a heath if there is no forest, it will turn into a desert".

However, except for these isolated cases the majority knows one thing: „forest is oxygen, pure air".

Part of the population of the settlements neighboring the forests notices climate and resource changes over the recent 20 years, which they explain by different factors: „There are sliding places in the forest, there are no trees over there, people say let's plant so that we have trees next year to stop the sliding, as the forest protects us in every way. Then it is also pure air." /Gosh, women/; „Today our elders say, we have never seen such a thing that the birds eat alfalfa. I say, what else can they do? There are no fruit trees, pear trees, apple trees..." /Kapan, leaders/; „Of course there is such a change. For example we have a field, in the past *aveluk* (wild mountain sorrel) was growing in our field, now you will not find a single branch"; „Well the vegetation in this area used to be thicker in the past, now it has thinned out, such phenomena indeed exist."; „In the past it would snow in the right season, it would top for two meters and then would melt away again when the right time would come. Now it's already a couple of years that we have not seen snow, the maximum is 30-40 cm once or twice per season. Now it is totally different. The waters have completely dwindled" /Artsvanik, men/.

The reasons and causes of such changes have never been discussed with the participants of our discussions and during our talks people were trying to find explanations from their own experience. For example in Gosh they believed that there were less mushrooms in the forest and they explained this by the factor that due to the ban on forest logging for firewood gathering of fallen and rotten trees as well as wood wastes from the parts of the forest nearby the village had increased whereas mushrooms grow mainly on those wastes.

In Dilijan, Gosh and Berd the participants talked a lot about the disappearance of elm trees. One of Gosh women even told that her father predicted the disappearance of elm trees long ago, which they considered to be fatalistic: „There are trees that the nature itself does not accept and they disappear, why this happens I wouldn't know. My father used to say that a time would come that the elm trees would dry so much that would cease to exist. Now the elm trees have vanished. Then he said the hornbeam trees would dry and disappear, then emmer, and with that the nature will be destroyed, so to say there will be less oxygen and the life of people will be less... And indeed it happens... That elm tree has vanished, there is almost no elm tree anymore...”

In Artsvanik village which is situated nearby Kapan people imputed all the changes in natural resources to the accumulation of hazardous substances which are generated by Kajaran copper-molybdenum plant's industrial wastes, as the so called „tailing dump” of the factory is in Artsvanik village: „For example, the apples in our garden have dried completely, there are no more apples. We don't have apple trees anymore. There were times when I had very good apple trees, now they have dried up. No apples, no pears, they just dry up by themselves... In the past there was a very good territory in the gorge, across which a river with clean water ran with lots of fish. It was very hot there and you could expect good harvest from everything. It used to be the best area of our village, now we don't have it anymore. The gardens of our collective farming were there: grapes, watermelons, there was everything there... Now we have neither water, nor a river. In the past the river was running down from the uphill and was passing across our territory. It was very good. But now? All that dust... eeeeeeh, if a slight wind blows it brings all the dust here... Two years ago a cow gave birth to a two headed calve.../Artsvanik, women/.

“When the tomatoes are about to become red they falls off the branch. I was growing peaches-*shyvтали*, a wild type of a peach, When it was almost ripe it became loose at the top. Then it would turn black and fall. In that tailing dump there are fish, they grow big in there but when you take them out they are stinky... a human can't eat it... Its chemistry, all over, that is why the forests are infected... that tree is not giving yield... in all this chemistry it is the forest that still keeps us.”

As for water decrease in Artsvanik they explain it by explosions, as a result of which the riverbeds change: „Our water flew from the neighboring village, as they were building tunnels there were explosions and the river bed changed its direction, now it has a different path... the riverbed changes its direction... there were explosions in the 60s and the earthquake of 1962 also had its impact. when you pour the water in the glass and then boil it there is fur... Volcano stuff we had here...But it always existed, it is not something new” /Artsvanik, men/.

Some link environmental changes to the indifference, egoism of people, to the abuse of nature and with the overall decline of moral values: "... those who go to the fields and forests instead of tearing off the leaf tear it up by the roots: Well, if I do that, you do, that one, then the other one it will decrease, and in a course of time disappears at all. Then say, the cattle, they just carelessly leave it free, they trample, what do I know, everyone in their turn and the tiling dump in its turn, that's why it vanishes little by little." /Artsvanik, women/ .

*3. Should the forests be left to the arbitrary utilization by the population or the forests are part of national heritage requiring protection to be preserved for the future generations.*

The overwhelming majority of discussion participants find that the utilization of forests must be free, the forest goods must be accessible and affordable for everyone, but that at the same time the forest must be used carefully and that criteria of careful treatment should be defined and control carried out. All of them agreed that it was not them who created the forest, and that the current population inherited it from the previous generations and therefore should preserve it for the future generations. The population of the settlements neighboring forests and especially of rural settlements find that that is exactly the way they treat the forest- with great care and that they know from their experience what and how should be done so that the forest is not damaged much by the activities of people, and in case the forest is damaged then most of the time it is done by the „strangers”, those who don't live there „because they don't know how to treat the forest” and „because they don't really care for the forest.”

“We bring only those trees that the wind breaks and falls down, otherwise if we cut the trees, shall they grow again? It is the tree that protects the forest” /Gosh, women/; „The forest is feeding us, if they damage the forest what shall we be using next year?”/Azatamout, women/; „The villager will never cut a young tree, never, but the outsiders, what does he care if the forest is devastated? They cut the best trees and take them away”/Kapan, women/. „The wood that the villager uses is fallen trees, damaged, rotten ...The villager would never damage the forest” /Kapan, Artsvanik, women/.

“If the forest is used for business purposes now, in five years time there will not be a forest here” /Dilijan, men/; „Without control the forest will devastate very quickly” /Shnogh, women/; „In terms of protection our forest holds one of the last places... If you look worldwide Armenia holds the last place „Berd, leaders/.

The main example of a careless, egotistic attitude towards the forest is considered to be firewood taken from the forest, and in particular the circumstance that the trees are used for industrial purposes. However, besides this common generalization, some people also recollected examples from their settlements of people who break accepted norms and conclude that without a proper control the people will damage the forest at a larger scale. Opinions were expressed also that irrespective of the attitude of a person/persons, forests have self-regeneration abilities and there is no need to worry much. Some exceptional opinions were also expressed, in particular with regard to the fact that in disastrous situations the mankind always finds a way out and if forest devastation would result in a disastrous situation the mankind would find a way out of that situation as well. There were also people who openly in the presence of the group claimed that they „live for the day” and if “in today's Armenia people do whatever they wish, so they must care only about themselves. If they don't use their forest at its most it is done and will be done by the others.”

The main, prevailing approach however leads to the concept of forest protection, restoration and governance necessity. Those of the participants of the discussion who in the Soviet times were adult, could remember reasonable plans of forest utilization, when planned forest logging was carried out both for firewood and for construction and industrial purposes paralleling it with forest planting, regular sanitary cleanings of the forest and in general directed towards forest development.

Besides the damages caused to the forest by the population the participants of the discussion spoke also of other damages to the forest, mainly concerning global problems of forest care. One of the village mayors for example finds that the self-regeneration of the forest is not a mechanical phenomena, that without human interference in that process the forest not only will not regenerate but will also suffer losses „For example-he said,- in case the forest is thick air can't get there, which means that seedlings don't grow, there is no air ventilation, the trees rot and as a result of all this the forest not only doesn't develop but also damages. The way out of such a situation is that in the areas like that the forest must be thinned out a little bit. As a result both the man and the forest will benefit. The man will use cut trees and the thinned out forest will undergo through regeneration process. However this costs money which the forestry doesn't have. As a result the part of the forest which is closer to the settlement is logged, which spoils it and the forest loses its function. and in the deep parts of the forest nothing is done, which again harms the forest. Individuals can't do that either for three reasons; first of all he is not a specialist, secondly people are poor and they hardly manage to solve their day to day problems and thirdly it is not regulated. There isn't a road to get to the far parts of the forest, no infrastructure. So it turns out that there is spare wood in the forest which the people need and in case of using that wood the forest will benefit, however the situation is such that people use the wood of the part of the forest which leads to forest damaging.”

All the participants agreed that if the forest is utilized on arbitrary basis it would cause disastrous consequences. Even those people who considered that they treat the forest carefully during the discussions were coming to the conclusion that in case forest control decreases they might utilize the forest more aggressively. If they are not afraid of fines and penalties many would cut the trees not only for firewood for their families, but also for sale. In the discussions of focus groups this was explained by low living standards of the population and by overall decrease of moral values. Still many find that if forest control is less strict there would be total deforestation and the trees will be cut both for the needs of the population and for sale. «But you know why they must sell? Because of lack of jobs. There are no jobs, no income.” /Artsvanik, Gosh, Shnogh/. «Why should one person be allowed to do everything, and the other one, that is poor and doesn't have protection should not be allowed to do anything?” As a result it can be confirmed that the reason for the population treating the forest more carefully is not the concern to preserve the forest to pass it to the future generations, but the fear of being punished. All the participants be it men, women or “leaders” affirmed this definition.

#### *4. Do they know about the forest management plan? Have they heard anything about the management plan of their forest?*

Representative of the older and the middle generations know or have a certain understanding that the forests are managed, and even without being aware of the management plan more or less clearly understand what does forest management imply. In reality the majority have never heard

about the forest management plan, neither have they seen it. The summary of those perceptions is as follows: „every year it should be counted how many trees should be cut, which trees are to be cut, where it should be cut, they elaborate a plan and inform all the representations of „Hayantar” in Marzes. No one knew how many trees should be cut or planted all over the republic, or in their marz, or in their territory of „Hayantar”. Some of them know that „Hayantar” as an institution is included in the Ministry of Agriculture, however many of them, and especially women do not know anything neither about the structure and responsibilities of the government, nor of „Hayantar”. Their relationship with the forest are on individual level, and are regulated either by the forester, or by the head of their community.

Basically not knowing about the management plan people still know that somewhere calculations and decisions are made: „I know that in autumn they stamp the trees. That is they decide which of the trees to leave and which can be cut down. Probably they have that project, that map... the forester knows which forest can be cut down” /Kapan, women /.

Most of the young people and women are absolutely unaware of the management plan. To them the whole forest management is about giving permission on forest logging and wood waste collecting by the forester: how much and where from is something that is up to the forester to decide. Yet even if forest-man relationship is planned somewhere, those who regulate all that, according to the participants of discussions do not take into consideration the real needs of the population. In particular for example the permission to gather wood wastes begins in autumn: “they allow you to bring the wood from the forest when it is mud all over, so go get the wood and burn it, if you can. They just don’t let you, they have their budget, if it is over, go get it in the muddy winter. How can you do that? You live there, you don’t know how it is over here. ,, „The forestry just puts a ban for one month, in the dry season it wouldn’t allow you to go. This man needs to burn that one cubic meter now, to cook food for his kid, things like that, but they just ban it.”

If forest utilization is really planned somewhere it would be better if they announce in advance and inform the people where, in which forests how many trees will be cut down, who is going to do that /it is more preferable that the woodman are residents of neighboring settlements/, at what price it will be sold, how much wood wastes shall be gathered where it shall be stored and how and how will it be possible to acquire it.

Some of them, those who know that „Hayantar” is under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, find that it is an essential and key mistake: «Probably in no other country of the world the forest system, if we can say so, or the forestry is given to the ministry of agriculture, this is probably a unique occurrence, that this forest sphere is in the balance of the ministry of agriculture. This leads to far more negative consequences. The forest is neither watered nor cared it is just logged and carried away, it is money. There is absolutely no forest restoration. The ministry of agriculture is not doing anything for Armenia, whoever the minister is, the ministry of agriculture is not doing anything. When they gave the forest to the ministry, it was probably in 2003, before that it was a separate state committee, so when the forest was given to them they found an additional source of income and they put all the agricultural machinery to eliminate the forest. Those tractors came out of order when eliminating the forests, now you can’t find a tractor. They used the whole tractor park that remained from the Soviet Union to carry the wood from the forests. When a man sows in spring or in autumn he waits to get the crops next autumn. He waits for one complete year. He works hard to get some crop. And when he goes cuts down



the tree and carries it away he gets his money right over he does not wait for one year. The psychology of the people changes with forest devastation, he gets his money the same day. Now the tractor driver will not go and work in the field on 2 hectares of land for the whole day, working hard, running round like a squirrel in a cage, so that the villager gives his money, wouldn't he prefer just to take away one timber... So far I have never heard about any project of the ministry of agriculture that would show forest development. It manages not the forest but its devastation. And in fact he is a monopolist, because local self-governance bodies have no right for the forest, and can't interfere their affairs" /Berd, leaders/authorities/.

Separate people are absolutely convinced that real, factual forest management is adjusted to market logics and not to calculation of vital functions of the forest „Today the issue of logging or not logging the forest is decided in the market and not based on state programs. For instance all of us know how much is the wood demand conditioned by gas issue. It is widely known that due to gasification the demand for wood has decreased. Now look, gas tariffs have been increased again. All of know that that increase in price was not reasoned and justified. The prices for gas have risen for several times already and as gas becomes more expensive forest logging begins. Now the people are excited and are all involved in gasification, in Shamshadin the people put the last money to get gas in their homes, they do this in different ways and it is very hard. But eventually the increased price for gas again has led to forest devastation.

Secondly, the main portion of industrial wood is used to produce parquet. It is already three years now that they almost don't take any wood. It is two years that not a single parquet was taken, because in blocks they already use laminated floors, that is to say the wood demand has decreased to a certain extent, because wood costs more expensive, than laminate. Besides, it is quite difficult to find a woodman in Shamshadin now. It is a very difficult and hard work, many people got sick. Now even if you open a parquet workshop, you will not find workers to go to the forest and cut trees. They pay very little for that job. And if they pay more, then the price for the parquet itself will grow, which already has no demand now. So yes we can say that forest logging has decreased to some extent, but forest management has nothing to do with that. Forest managers most of all disturb the villager not allowing him to gather his firewood, his wood wastes. Is this forest management?" /Berd, leaders/.

In some of the focus groups of leaders/community authorities participants found that if forest governance is being planned at all, then basically in terms of how to make legal the illegal. An example brought to illustrate this opinion was that forest logging is carried out mainly under the cover of „Sanitary cleaning”, and the wood acquired through „sanitary cleaning” is used for construction. Quite many of the participants mentioned that those parts of their forests that indeed needed sanitary cleaning nothing was being done for, at the same time „sanitary cleaning” is carried out there where the trees are in a perfect condition. Besides damaging the forest the population is also upset because perfect wood for construction and other industrial purposes in fact is acquired at the price of „wood waste”<sup>4</sup>. The only way to stop this vicious practice as they

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<sup>4</sup> In Shnogh we were shown the stored wood that was generated due to forest logging in Teghut, which was being sold as firewood on completely legal basis, but which comprised excellent, valuable types of trees. In Teghut forest logging is not carried out selectively; all the trees on the way to the mine are cut down. The residents think that the forester who has the right to sell the wood in fact when selling valuable types of wood registers them at a very cheap price as firewood, wood wastes, but in reality he sells it at the market price for valuable wood. The stored wood is sold very slowly. “If they sold it for firewood would it still be there? It would have been completely sold long ago. And villagers who are looking for firewood buy tickets, which allow them to gather the branches of trees scattered on that same road. He is not even doing the sanitary cleaning; he just gathers the best pieces of wood and slowly sells it under the name of firewood.”

believe is in forbidding the utilization of forest wood of Armenia for construction or other industrial purposes.

Without knowing, seeing or criticizing forest management plans, the participants of our discussions however suggest to plan forest utilization /as a matter of fact to manage the forest/. Most of them see the possibility for that on the example of their communities and within their communities. They find that communities neighboring forests better know „their” forests and they will manage together with their village mayor to plan the preservation, the protection, the development and the utilization of the forest. Many especially men and leaders find that local self-governance bodies are more transparent, that the population one way or another gets informed about the decisions made and that community leaders have less chances to get involved in illegal deals. All of these discussions and debates eventually were gradually ending up with the conclusion that the ownership for the separate parts of the forest could be given to the communities.

The possibility of forest ownership by the community excites some of the villagers, because first of all, this means facilitating the access to the forest. People will deal directly with their village mayor: „First of all to bring wood you need to get to Syunik *sovkhos* (state farm). The forestry is over there. We make the payments there. Wouldn't it be better if our village mayor managed all that? Let it belong to our community, and the money we pay will enter our community budget. And it can be used for the needs of our village. Besides, the villager is more attached to his village, the village mayor knows his residents better than the forester, who sometimes you get there and he is not there, then you need to go again, then again...Just you count how many times you have to go back and forth to make that payment, and if it is in your village it will be easier. And more profitable, too. Let that money go to the budget of our village municipality, and what will be the relationship between the village mayor and the forester it is already up to them. But it would be better if the villager dealt directly with his village municipality.”

Some participants thought that in case the forest belongs to the community wood processing plants would be established and not wood but processed wood would be taken away from their forest. Eventually it would also create job places. „Instead it would be better if they opened a wood processing plant here, the wood wouldn't leave here, workers would have a job, would process, whatever... If the mayor has a business, wood processing workshop here, some 20-30 people would have jobs, he would produce furniture, otherwise I don't know... Now if the village mayor has a processing workshop he must buy the wood from the forestry, which is not profitable, it is very expensive.

“Yes, some changes will take place, our local officials are much more caring, more conscientious, and much more human, and we meet with him every day face to face. Whereas for the ministry of agriculture or for the forestry we are just Shamshadinians, nameless, without anything” /Berd, leaders/.

As developed the ideas of passing forest protection and maintenance to local-self governance bodies generated new questions concerning forest utilization and control. In the majority of settlements forest utilization forms were viewed differently, but the differences between „our” meaning the residents of a settlement in question and „the others” rights and responsibilities were prevailing. For instance to make wood waste gathering free of charge for the population of

settlements neighboring forests, i.e. „the owners of the forest”, to sell the wastes only to „outsiders”....All the members of the community should be able to gather and sell wood wastes to the outsiders making some payments to the community budget. Or the community members should buy the cut trees very cheap, and the price established for the “outsiders” should be incomparably higher. Instead all the families of the community utilizing the wood should participate in all forest related works, whatever the Council of the Elder would set forth: growing the seedlings, planting trees, additional control. In any case the forest with all its goods should be accessible to everyone. There should be a specialist of forest restoration programs, who would get paid from the payments for forest utilization in the community budget. Forest control shall be realized by the state through the Ministry of Nature Protection. The representative of the Ministry of Nature Protection shall participate in elaboration of the community plans annually.

However many, and especially the leaders find that in case the forest is under the supervision of the community it will eventually face the same dangers as now, sometimes even bigger threats among which are the following: the village mayor will not be able to refuse if a villager asks for a favor, or the village mayor in reality and in fact is not accountable to the community and is out of their control. The head of the local self-governance bodies and the members of the Council of the Elder are elective positions and to gain the favor of the voters they can threaten both the protection and the preservation of the forest.

Instead they suggest another option: communities might participate in the management of the forest together with its restoration, protection and utilization. The forest remains state property but at the same time the forms and possibilities for the communities neighboring the forests to participate in forest management shall be defined. There shouldn't be only one structure which would manage the forest alone and on its own.

The question whether „Certain parts of the forest can become private property” received a negative answer everywhere. The arguments of the absolute majority of participants confirmed that in the current illegal relations existing in Armenia no matter what limitations should be imposed on the owner of the forest with respect to forest preservation or conditions regarding forest restoration they will not work. „Then they will punish those who will not be convenient for them at that moment and someone else will remain unpunished, but what is the benefit of that, if the forest is already damaged” In fact people were very anxious that in case of private property the possibilities of using the forest will be substantially limited for the population: „each of them will build a fence, will put a guard so that people will not be able even to enter the forest”. Main argumentations of objections:

- If privatized, which owner will say come and gather some wood from my forest.
- They will not let us even to approach the forest.
- Personally speaking, if I became an owner of the forest I also wouldn't allow anyone to make use of my forest the way they want.
- What is all this, are they trying to kill this people. He says we are stealing: he is the thief, one fish is 1000 AMD.
- No one tries to understand our situation, should it be different if it is a private property.
- Ok, you have already expressed your opinion, so for you the best option is the community?
- Not private. If it is private will they let the people use it?

The summarized conclusion of discussion results is that people prefer the relationship that exists at the present moment, as in this case „we can to a certain degree make use of the nature for winter.” The most important issue that continues to bother most of the participants is still the facilitating the collection of wood wastes free of charge and legalizing the cutting down of damaged trees: «Let the state adopt a law that would give out wood wastes to the population of the settlements neighboring the forest free of charge. We mean only the wood wastes. If they make it free of charge the forest will be quieter, the forest will clean up, no more conflicts will arise neither with the forester, not with the environmentalists. They can calculate for each person by the number of family members and give out the wood wastes. They can start at 10 cubic meters- at least. And the maximum can be set at 20 cubic meters.” „Let them permit the people to go and cut the trees that are stamped by the forester. Fines can be imposed if other trees are cut. But if the trees are already stamped, if they already know that those trees can be cut down then they shouldn't ask for a special permission to do that. The one, who cuts the trees down helps the forester, doesn't he.”

*5. In your opinion and based on what you know what is the damage caused by illegal forest logging? And in case it is wrong, what is wrong about it?*

The discussions on the issue of the damages of illegal forest logging most of the time were exceeding the given topic and transferring into the area of defining „illegal forest logging” itself. Based on the opinion of the majority of residents the question of legal or illegal is mainly conditioned by one factor: does the person have the „paper” or no? If the person has got the „paper” then whatever he does, whatever trees he cuts it is considered legal, if he doesn't have it is illegal, even if it is only about gathering wood wastes. In particular in women's groups the general perception that illegal is what one can get caught for and punished prevailed. If a person can manage to build his relationship with the forester so that breaches committed by him are not detected it is legal: „If, say, the forester cuts the trees down himself, he knows which to cut down so that not to violate the law, so that neither he will be complained of nor you.” Thus not the violation itself is considered illegal but rather those forms of violation that lead to punishment.

Yet, besides formal ideas on legal-illegal there are also real assessments. An overwhelming notion that the type and quantity of the firewood used by the population is such that it can not damage the forest. On the opposite the quality and the collection method of the firewood applied by the population of the settlements neighboring the forest only helps the forest. „Well, if the tree, say, is old, it must be cut down, if it is not healthy it must be cut, if it is drying it is better to cut it. If you cut the young plants it is illegal, if you cut a fruit tree it is illegal, pear trees, ash trees – it is illegal, fruit trees shouldn't be cut by no means. Now this doesn't have to do anything with the circumstance whether you have a paper permitting you to cut trees or not. Maybe you have the paper; you have the right to cut one good tree. In many cases you see that they go and cut the seedlings, this size, because there are cases when there is demand for that, maybe that is more expensive somewhere, they need to cut those. Yet I don't have a paper, but I cut one drying, rotting, falling tree. What really matters to us is that we can burn it. I don't have the paper, because I didn't manage to go to the forestry, I am just a villager, for me it is difficult to go there, or I didn't manage to take the forester to show that damaged tree. Now see what happens, the tree that I cut is illegal but doesn't harm the forest, and the tree cut by him is legal, but it is the very one which damages the forest. Now you ask what the damage is caused by illegal forest logging. The damaging is always when the important trees of the forest are cut- be it legal or illegal” /Kapan, women/.

According to the perceptions of the participants of discussions the forest is damaged by forest logging for industrial purposes no matter how legal it is backed by the „paper.” Thus the issue transfers onto a different level. Legal or illegal the forest is damaged by the logging of healthy trees, as currently forest logging in Armenia is carried out, as the population believes and knows, based not on forest study and coordination of forest protection programs, but based on arbitrary decisions and even without any corresponding decisions.

As some of the respondents, especially among the leaders believe in Armenia forest logging for industrial purposes should be banned completely, as any permission of the type in fact leads to exceeding the permitted volumes for several times bypassing permitted norms of forest logging. This opinion is not being reasoned by the peculiarities of Armenian forests but rather by the legal permissiveness.

Together with this general opinions there are also opinions based on some exclusively individual examples. Many find that forest logging in Armenia is not carried out professionally. From the Soviet times people got used to thinking that tree cutting is a profession and that different trees should be cut differently. At the same time they find that in the recent 20 years the trees have been cut and continue to be cut carelessly, without taking into consideration the peculiarities of a specific tree.

In case the trees are cut down by individuals illegally, secretly, robbing the person on the one hand hurries not to be caught and on the other cuts the tree so down to the root so as to be able to conceal the stub of the tree by covering it with earth. The person who steals when cutting the tree is not acting out of forest protection motives and ruled by the expediency of cutting a certain tree, but rather out of mere convenience and possibility to hide the place of the logging. In any case the person who steals harms both the tree and the forest.

#### *6. Who should be concerned with forest related problems?*

The majority of discussion participants theoretically think that everyone should be concerned with the state of the forest be it rural or urban residents. Their concern is expressed through careful attitude towards the forest, not damaging it and in case of necessity they are ready to assist forest regeneration and cleaning works. After the discussions many have agreed that in all the communities the residence would agree to work for the protection of the forest for a day or two on voluntary basis; to do cleaning, planting etc., in case it is initiated by local self-governance bodies. In fact that is the way they are doing currently.

If it is organized by an NGO they would hardly participate. The members of the Councils of the Elder included in the leaders focus groups of some of the settlements were the first to say that the forest was being logged and damaged by the outsiders, and that they couldn't do anything about that, and that that problem should be solved by the state and not the residents of settlements neighboring the forest.

In separate focus groups the cases were discussed when in some of the communities during mass forest loggings of 1996-97 some of the community members tried to oppose, object to those processes, were writing letters to the president of the country and other officials who were authorized to interfere and stop large scale forest loggings. /Kapan, Berd/ however their efforts

were not only fruitless, but the loggings were increasing day by day and were carried out in a more illegal way. „They saw that the tractors entered the forest and were cutting paths to the thicker parts of the forest, they saw that ten vehicles a day were taking timber away from the forest, but they not only did nothing, but the police would stand there so that no one disturbed them. The forester that was supposed not to let them do all that, worked together with them, he was coming to our village to take workers to help cut and load the trees. All those who had *drujba* (a type of a band saw) had worked for them.” /Berd, Gosh, Azatamout/. The people concluded that forest logging is backed up at the highest governmental level and ceased to interfere. The complaints became very intense within the communities, but the discussions remained closed, people were even afraid to talk about all that. This fragment from the discussion that took place in the focus group of Dilijan women illustrates the way concerns were expressed:

- We say, we say all the time what are they doing?
- Whom do you tell?
- We? We tell each other, we say don't they see anything? They are harming Dilijan forests so much.
- What does the forest benefit if you just speak in between?
- Well if you go there with your workers, and freely cut down, it means they are aware.
- Who is aware? If people with a higher position than yours are aware does that mean you should be satisfied by that?
- But what can we do?
- Maybe they have bribed the forester?
- If they have bribed him, what can we do? Those who do all that are free, and those who don't suffer.

According to the majority of focus groups forest maintenance should be carried out by those who own the forest and those who get paid for that. „The employee of the forestry if he plants a tree he gets a salary for that, that is why we say that they should take care of the forest. If the villager knows that the forest belongs to him, the tree belongs to him, he *will* plant.” „Those who cut the trees should plant them. If we cut the tree we must plant. If the trees are cut by others, why should we plant? Let them do that. When they give permissions to cut the trees, do they ask us?”. “If urban residents used it, they must come clean, plant trees, if you cut a tree you must plant instead.”

Our statement that forest damaging first of all harms the population and the settlements neighboring the forest received an almost unanimous reply of the participants: they understand that is true, but they are not capable, they just can't prevent that. They find that the forest is damaged and this is done mainly through illegal logging, by privileged people, who have the protection of the authorities. „Well they come, cut down, damage the trees to earn their money, no one twits them, no one holds them accountable, why should we go and restore what they have damaged?”. The forest belongs to the state, thus the state must take care of the forest and control its protection.

Besides all this the population basically got used to the idea that forestry is a professional work, and no one except the specialists approved by the state has the right to work in the forest.

The majority of residents realize the necessity to preserve the forest, but find that this can not be fulfilled only on the account of the concern expressed by the population. In case environmental and especially forest conservation programs are realized people are willing to work for free by participating in planting, sanitary cleanings etc. In some areas there are also initiatives carried out by people who understand the problem. In Kapan, for example, one of the NGOs initiated a project of regenerating walnut trees that were violently logged, and currently seedlings of apple and pear trees are prepared through growing the seeds and also they have an agreement with „Hayantar” concerning all this. In the course of our field studies in Tavoush marz /Dilijan, Berd/ we have witnessed a tree planting initiated by the governor’s office together with school pupils. There was even some excitement. However the majority of the people have a very incredulous attitude towards these initiatives: „They gather altogether, plant several hundreds of trees, then show it on TV as if they are doing something, regenerating the forest. But as they complete the planting they will go away and forget, who is going to water and protect those seedlings? If 10% of planted trees grow it will be a great success.” /Dilijan, men, Azatamout, Berd, leaders/. «If they treated this activity seriously, they would choose those parts of the forest where the seedlings more likely would grow and where there would be water for the trees. But just have a look, they plant those trees in such places that are visible for people, to show that they are doing something; but there is no water, no shade there, what they do is superfluous, the money they spend is in vain.”

The population has two basic forest related concerns: forest protection and possibilities to utilize the forest. People find that even now their careful treatment of the forest, irrespective of the reasons for such a careful attitude, is protecting the forest. As for forest utilization here the participants of discussions think and our observations confirm that control over forest utilization has acquired such forms that make the people be afraid of the forest and feel themselves as if they are thieves. ...«Yes, the residents think it is better not to cut this tree but to work if there was a job, instead of getting to the forest and bringing wood, it is not profitable, that is what he thinks. But whether he wants it or not he has to go so that his child is not cold and he has a piece of bread to keep him” /Azatamout/.

Those people that are more aware of social-economic processes explain the sometimes indifferent attitude of the population towards the forest by the overall degrading of the people and the feeling of frustration. „They don’t hope that they will continue living here. As the people don’t cultivate the land, there is no agriculture, no farming they become indifferent towards everything. People have become convinced that by cultivating the land they will not achieve anything. Added to that is that many have no financial means to cultivate their lands, they even can’t afford diesel to use the tractor in the field. As they don’t work for years on, people that don’t cultivate their lands this leads to people’s becoming uncivilized to a certain extent...” /Berd, leaders/. „The villager now lives on the account of the fallow, Russia. All the men are abandoning the village, the majority of the young people have already left, how should they protect the forest?” „They already have other things to take care of.” /Gosh, leaders/.

*7. Who must carry the responsibility for the forest? And who should do the management? Who overlooks the forest? Hayantar? Inspectors of environmental protection? The police?*

The most common opinion of the population is that the forestry /Hayantar/ is responsible for the forest. It is Hayantar that is responsible for forest protection /preservation/ and it realizes this task through the foresters.

Discussion participants could not grasp how could the forest belong to one party /in the case in question to the state/ and its supervision/ control realized by another party. Awareness about the Ministry of Nature Protection is very vague. People have heard, many of them know that the „ecologists” are those who overlook the forest, but they find that the latter only make their lives more complicated, more „expensive,” as in case they get caught when cutting a tree it will cost cheaper to enter a deal with the forester. „With the ecologists it is more expensive.” „First of all they should change the name of Nature Protection Ministry into a Ministry of exploitation, it is shame to have the word protection in that title, it should be removed... that ecology thing is doing nothing except collecting the taxes: Their are not doing ecology, they are not protecting the forest” /Berd, authorities/.

On the other hand, many do not know at all who are ecologists, where are they situated physically, and what could be agreed upon with them /Shnogh, women, men/. It is the foresters that most of the time threaten the population by „ecologists,” the foresters, with which the population is most of the time familiar and with whom they often interact. As the foresters give the permission to gather wood wastes they give a „ticket” usually for 2-3 cubic meters, but they allow to bring more /keeping the difference in price, value/, usually when they give the permission to gather wood wastes they warn „Watch out, don’t run into ecologist”, „Be careful that the ecologists don’t find out”. As the people in fact do not know what is the function and rights of the ecologists, they are afraid of the latter. Foresters are more comprehensible.

It is not always that people understand that „ecologists” and „environmentalists” are the same thing. People don’t know for sure who has the right to overlook the forest: „the ecologists at one side, the police at the other, then there are the environmentalists and the forestry... but people although are afraid but still get to the forest. Even if they bring the wood on donkeys they again ask for money. Whoever catches takes money. „Well, let us see, the ecologists control, then there is the forester, the forestry with its staff again checks, the police controls, several times a year they also come from the ministry for the check ups, several times the journalists enter the forest, they shoot the forest to show which trees are cut” /Gosh, leaders/.

In Shnogh village which is quite often visited by „ecologists” because of the forest logging in the neighboring Teghut village, also they had a very vague idea on who they were. After discussing the role of the ecologists in the focus group this fragment from the conversation of two young people illustrates the approximate picture:

- Do you know where the ecology is?
- Ehe, they come, circle around and leave.
- Who are they? Have you seen those that came here to circle around?
- I saw their car, but never seen them.
- How do you know that that car is the car of the ecologists?
- Well, they say so, what can I say.
- Was there a sign of the ecologist on the car?
- No it was the numbers.
- Someone recognized it was the ecology car by the numbers?
- Yes.
- But where is it, don’t you know?
- No.



- Is there ecology in the village?
- No, the ecology of the village is *abeshik* /the forester/forest guard/
- Ok, what about Alaverdi, Akhtala? Don't you know where it is?
- No.
- Tatev, don't you know where ecology is either?
- There is no ecology over here.
- How do you know there isn't?
- They come from a different place, but... it is *abeshik* /forest guard/ and also the chief of forestry.
- Are that *abeshik* /forest guard/ and ecology the same structure?
- As far as I know, *abeshik* oversees that no one damages the forest.
- What is ecology then?
- Y.M. – ecology is also the same, it is supervising, I guess.
- Who is that one supervising?
- Well, they oversee the forest guard, the chief forester...
- Tatev- It punishes.
- Who does it punish?
- For example the chief forester, that he has put there, it punishes, says, why are you not watching?
- Y.M. The head.
- Have you ever heard that it has punished someone?
- Yes. For example I know a lot of people that they fired.
- They were fired because of ecology?
- Yes. Shamlugh chief forester. The ecology caught him at selling wood.
- Is it good that ecology is protecting the forest?
- What do I know? The forester does too. The relationship between people gets worse; they punish. Right now in our village wood is being sold, why doesn't the ecology punish them?

“Forest protection” is introduced to the population mainly in the form of prohibitions: not to enter the forest in spring so that forest animals are not disturbed /population of the settlements neighboring reserve forests and national park/; not to enter the forest holding a knife or an axe/ the forester suspects there is an intention to cut trees/, the cattle shouldn't enter the forest not to damage the seedlings and branches. „They don't even let the cattle enter the forest, they say that the cattle destroy the roots of the trees, it loosens and the tree dries. It is true that instead of planting trees we might damage the existing when we let the cattle go into the forest. But the cattle want to eat, it is summer, and we can't take the cattle to the mountains. And we don't have other pasture. So how should we do, we can't stop giving the kids milk and yogurt, can we? But we don't let the cattle unobserved. We are also human, we understand everything, and there is always someone to watch the cattle.” If the forester, the “ecologist” ask these people to help them in forestry, they will go with pleasure, but they also want to have their own farming/business.

Is the police responsible for forest protection? The majority answer immediately „Of course.” “The forest is the state, and the policeman is the employee of the state”. The statement that the state has many different employees, but it doesn't mean that all of them are responsible for forest protection usually causes hesitation. The policeman is perceived as an inspector. Part of the discussion participants tried to prove that policemen have nothing to do with the forest; however the others talked about their own experience. People have an experience based knowledge that

“it is better not to deal with the policemen at all” and in case of “running into him” to try to get rid of him as soon as possible. Experience shows that policemen are rarely met in the forests, but one can meet them on the road and the right to ask questions is attributed to him. If the policeman asks a question you ought to answer. The answer can have consequences, so in order to avoid all that it is more preferable to “close the issue” with the policeman: “Half of the wood I had gathered I had to take to his home” /Shnogh/; «He said I’ll take you to the police department with all that wood you have gathered right away. Well if one is taken to the police department it costs more expensive. So I said: say your price and let me go.”

Not a single institution, be it „Hayantar”, „nature protection”, the „police”, the school, or local self-governance bodies have ever in any form carried out explanatory and/or awareness activities with regard to the rights of the population towards the forest, or in order to explain state programs; nowhere we came across an announcement or an information bulletin and neither did the residents which would tell why is one thing or another prohibited in a certain part of the forest, or in what ways people might utilize the forest, who should they be liable to or whether the community should have any responsibilities and rights with respect to the forest.

*The “community” is in the first place perceived as the town or village mayor: «our village mayor overlooks the forest very strongly; he wouldn’t let anyone enter it.” /Gosh, women, men /; «What can our town mayor do, who asks him, when they come in their kamaz trucks cut the forest and take it away.” /Berd, men/, «Everything is in the hands of our village mayor. If he wants he can protect the forest very well, if he wishes he can sell all of it » /Shnogh, women/.*

*Many found that the community should be responsible for the forest only in case it belonged to the community. “Well say, if the forest belongs to our village, whatever happens, if the forest belongs to the villager he can manage it better, can’t he? He will be more careful when entering the forest; he will watch more that no one harms the forest. Otherwise it is on our territory but we are just observers. They come and take away; they take away the seedlings... They take away on Kamaz trucks, but you only stand and watch.”*

The others find that the community can protect the forest only through participation in regeneration works... «They can organize tree planting, and we will participate”. Others object to this: «Let the forestry do that, if it gave the permission to log the forest, whoever it is a rich person, a parliament member, let him organize it”.

In fact in case something disastrous happens to the forest the first people to assist are the residents of neighboring settlements. Based on what both the villagers and the forester told us in the two instances of forest fires that happened in the settlements under study, the fire was put down by the villagers. Village municipalities and individuals with their own cars, fuel, their own resources throughout the whole night worked in the forest, some got burns.

Discussions with the foresters reveal a number of objective obstacles to forest protection: „To prevent stealing we receive an extremely small wage, only 40000 AMD, but we must keep the forest 24 hours seven days a week, hundreds of hectares. There isn’t a car, no fuel; they give us neither cloths nor shoes. If a fire starts in the forest, until I get to the place quite a large area is burnt. There are so many objective difficulties in protecting the forest that it is incomparably easier to “plunder” it.

8. *Who is logging the forest illegally? As a social group and not by names.*

“It depends on what you consider illegal. If it is about the paper, it is one thing, if cutting the trees that are not allowed to cut, it is a different thing. People who in fact cut those trees logging of which is illegal have a paper of legal forest logging, and sometimes people who don’t have an official paper cut trees, but the tree they cut is the permitted one. Common people can’t do illegal forest logging.”

“Now if I wanted to go to the forest and bring one cubic meter of firewood for my family, I wouldn’t be able to do that. But there are people, there are individuals that do this thing up till now, and it is all interconnected, linked be it with the chief or whoever they have on higher levels... It is this type of people that can utilize the forest now” /Berd, leaders/.

“Do you know who is devastating the forest? The vehicles. Even if we want to, we can’t devastate the forest, because we take only the fallen trees. Those who have „patronage” /Artsvanik, men/.

“Those who sell firewood in Yerevan log the forest, who are we to do forest logging. So they go there are trees that are allowed to cut based on the age, so they go and come to an agreement with the forestry to cut those trees. They take the permission, then go and cut age-old oaks, I don’t know what other trees that is not allowed, and thus they devastate the forest. That is to say 50 percent of logging is correct the other 50 we could say is illegal?” /Berd, women /.

“Aaaa, these are such people, that the forest guard will not even approach them. They are people of a different level.” /Artsvanik, men/.

“Common people like us, wouldn’t take the risk to make illegal logging. If we go and apply for a permission to legally cut the trees, we will not be given. But there are privileged people, they are allowed. Most of the forest logging is done by them, but they surely have the paper /meaning a permission, which means their logging is probably legal /H. Kh../ /Dilijan, women/.

9. *“Should they be punished or protected by the society from the supervisors/ police?”*

All the participants of our discussions unanimously found that illegal forest loggings should be punished, whoever did that. At the same time all of the participants also believed that the definition of legal-illegal and the criteria should be very distinct and clear. Many disagreed with the practice that when dealing with firewood in the forest only the official permission of „Hayantar” is considered legal. If wood wastes, fallen trees are gathered from the forest without a corresponding permission this shouldn’t be considered an act liable to punishment, on the opposite it must be encouraged. However as based on the current order people pay for the wood wastes, fallen trees and „stamped” trees, so first they must pay, get the permission and only after that they can „clean” the forest, otherwise this „cleaning” will be qualified as a wrongdoing subject to punishment. The other problem is that the forester which gives the permission to gather wood wastes decides on his own where the wood wastes should be gathered from... „It happens sometimes that that wood is deep in the gorge and far away from the road. The forester says one km deep in the gorge there is wood, go and bring it on your back. It is very hard for the man to bring the wood from the gorge on his back and get to the road to load it on the car. The conflict with the forestry starts here. There is no road, no one will invest that much money, and

the villager can't transport from there. Ok then, why doesn't the forestry go and bring the wood wastes from those inaccessible places and sell it to the buyers. It is not sufficient that they don't do that, on top of it they take money from people to do their job." /Gosh, men/.

„Often those people are punished that assist forest preservation. If a tree has fallen in the forest, the villager brings it, if it stays it will rotten and damage other trees, so it means he is cleaning the forest, but eventually he might be punished ... When making decisions concerning this type of issues they must discuss it with the local population. It must be some one that has felt all that on his own back. They sit there behind their desks and announce: prohibit, try the ones who have cut the trees in court, execute this one by shooting" /Gosh, men/.

„The fines are also only for villagers, they don't fine everyone, do they? There are people who carry away the whole forest, what fines are we talking about? They haven't left a single walnut tree in the whole area. How did they manage to take away all that, to appropriate all that? Let one villager go and cut one walnut tree, you'll see what they will do. And they stand and say that openly, they are not afraid of anything" /Artsvanik, men/.

„In our forest one big group has been cutting the trees for quite a period. They have even built a road for them so that they can transport big trees on vehicles. We are not even allowed to pass by that road, there is a guard standing there. In fact they must be punished, but they are protected, so that others don't harm them." /Berd, businessmen/

The majority of the residents don't know for a fact whether those that in their opinion are doing illegal forest loggings are punished or not, but they are sure that they are not. They believe that if there is anyone who is punished those are the forest guards and foresters on whose territory the illegal forest logging took place. In one case the forest logging might be done with the forester being aware, in another case no, but in any case foresters are the ones that are punished most of the time. As the residents believe foresters can be punished in case in the upper circles of the power „the situation with patronage" changes and in those circles there is an aim to shape a negative atmosphere with regard to certain people. This is how in Shnogh the case of firing and initiating a legal case against the forester of the neighboring Shamlugh village was explained.

The residents „defend" illegal relationship with the forest on a saving/careful mode under two conditions: first of all if the „offender" violated the rules out of extreme material need and if that offence has not damaged the forest much /shall he let his child freeze to death?" „let there be job places, jobs, other fuel, let them forbid everyone" „There are people who can afford that, they pay, get the „ticket", then go to the forest to get some wood. But there are others who can't afford taking a Ticket, so he goes and gathers dry wood, what else can he do? We are not expected to die of cold living in the forest, are we? / And secondly if the acting regulation is illogical.

Our talks with the judges from the marzes confirmed that usually minor offences or offences committed by poor and incapable people are subjected to judicial inquiry.

*10. Does the fact that people have been involved in logging the neighboring forest imply that it is a smaller offence? Do the people think that they have the right to cut the trees? Is illegal forest logging equivalent to stealing?*

Illegal forest logging is indeed a theft- this was the initial response of our focus groups. However as the discussions progressed they start to diversify their understanding of legal-illegal.

In focus group discussions the participants insisted that the residents of their communities didn't cut trees for already several years. „Now even if women enter the forest holding a knife or an axe, the forester catches, who has the courage to cut trees now? /Shnogh, women/. „Now if our villagers cut trees, even from the ministry they will not be able to release him, tree cutting is in the past” /Gosh, men, women /.

“It is stealing, what else can it be?,-said the leaders of Berd focus group, but immediately after that upon the objection of one of the participants a discussion started: „Say it were a poor, helpless single woman, she cut branches from the fallen trees, gathering dry wood they documented it as a theft. Today they are recording that minor incident, but when lots of trees are cut, they don't write anything. There are people that earn money by cutting trees, but at the same time there are those who solve their day to day survival problems. For example if you consider cutting trees to solve the day to day survival problems stealing it is against conscience, and in reality we don't consider that to be stealing.” After long discussions the group agreed that „cutting a tree is always stealing if all men are equal before the law. But as today the real forest cutters are privileged before the law, then those who are in extreme poverty and cut trees should not be considered thieves” /Berd, leaders/. This opinion is more or less common and in different wordings it can be observed as public opinion.

“If someone cuts the tree so that his child is not cold then it is not stealing, but if it is done to earn money, then it is stealing.”

“Cold is worse than starving. If you have no other way of heating then cutting trees is not an offence.”

“If a person cuts trees it is an offence, if he gathers wood wastes it is not. But if a person gathers dry tree, fallen tree or wood wastes without a permission he is punished for that.”

“It is an offence, what else can it be? If I cut one, you cut another, and if all of us cut, will the forest stand? But it is not us that cut the trees, and the trees we cut are not noticeable compared to the trees that others carry away, others not our residents.”

*11. Do they know when illegal forest logging becomes a crime that is to be punished, that is investigated by the Prosecutor's office and does not imply only administrative fines?*

“Honestly speaking I don't know where the borderline is, when forest logging is subjected to criminal liability.”-this reply given by one of Azatamout residents is more or less common for the rest of focus groups. In Azatamout focus group the question of liabilities was discussed for quite a long time. People know one thing- if a fine is imposed on them and they don't pay the fine a case could be initiated against them and the court will decide the form and size of their punishment. Women have a vaguer idea, they know one thing: “a report/record is written”; “they fine you.” No one has ever heard anywhere that against the damage caused to the forest the

punishment is set in form of doing works of forest regeneration. Everywhere only one type of punishment is known, i.e. fining. The size of the fines is also rather unclear: „it depends on the quantity of the wood”, „it depends on the type of the tree”, „it depends on the means of transportation, whether you carry it on your back, or on a donkey or vehicle”, „it depends on how many cubic meters you bring, it can be one and it can be 12 cubic meters”. The size of the fine usually is announced by the forester, and the offender usually tries to come to an agreement with the forester or to give part of the „established” fine to the forester and free him, or by bargaining with the forester to try to „reduce” the offence and consequently the size of the fine.

“If someone gets caught, the forester tells him, go to this and this place and make this payment, I am writing this much fine on you. They always say that cutting a tree is this and this much, the walnut is this much, the elm tree this much and the walnut tree this much... As far as I know if the fine exceeds 500.000 AMD then the case is transferred to the police. It is transferred to the police also in case there is a fine imposed on you but you don’t pay. From the police it can then go to the Prosecutor’s office, and then it is already a criminal case.” That is to say, according to the perceptions of the people, it is not the type of offence that makes the case criminal, but the process of punishment can at a certain point turn into a criminal case. But as soon as the issue starts to be discussed it turns out that in reality, people do not know the problem, the phenomena of violation and offence, and legal mechanisms of deciding those issues. When it comes to these questions even the village mayors say „I don’t know,” „I don’t know for sure.” And they start to complain: „Who tells us about all that, so that we know? For this the newspapers must print something or the news channel on TV should say in this and these cases the sizes of the fines are this and that...”

Only in one settlement, namely in Shikahogh municipality we came across a pricelist of fines, about which however the residents did not know.

Picture- pricelist of fines

*12. Has anyone heard about alternative heating or do they apply such heating practices?*

- a. Only gas
- b. partially gas
- c. Liquid fuel- diesel, oil etc.
- d. Coal
- e. Insulate house
- f. Saves throughout the year to pay for the heating in winter.
- g. Applies to the village mayor/Hayantar for a permission to gather dry branches.
- h. Other

In those settlements which have gas supply part of the population partially or completely heats the homes with gas heaters. This is common especially in the towns: Dilijan, Kapan, to a certain extent- Berd, as well as in large villages /e.g. Shnogh/. In settlements with gas supply those families utilize gas in which at least one person works, which means they have some income they can use to cover the expenses for gas. Although few but there are also some apartments that use centralized gas heating systems. Some people apply two, sometimes three types of heating: For example in the main living room they have a wood stove, and in the bedroom at night they turn the gas heater on at a low capacity. In the settlements where there is no gas supply in the bedrooms they sometimes use ovens using electric power. Other heating sources are not used and in Armenia they either do not exist at all or are very expensive there is no coal, no oil, and diesel

is very expensive. In the beginning of 2009 the perspective of heating the house by gas excited many. However in autumn people found out that with the increased price gas heating became unaffordable. In spring of 2010 when our study was in progress, the prices for gas went up again and everywhere people said that the majority of the people who used gas in 2009 would have to refuse it. However it is noteworthy that the absolute majority of the population from the settlements neighboring the forest in the last two-three years instead of using the wood of cut trees, in fact burns the wood wastes, branches, dried and fallen trees. All of this is firewood, and people call all of it wood. It is beyond any doubt that it will be still used for quite a long time, and not only as firewood. It is the wood product that is burnt in the tondir to cook bread; water for bathing, laundry and other needs is warmed on the ovens, and the dinner is cooked on the stove. Almost everywhere liquid gas is also often used. The stoves are mainly used in winter, and in that case the gas is supplementary and is used to make something quickly; coffee, tea, fried eggs. In summer gas consumption increases. But in summer too if something must be cooked for a long time /preserves, stewed fruit, other winter preserves/ they make a fire with wood. Thus it could be said that alternative fuel is not only familiar but often more preferable, although not affordable.

## ***Theme 2: Testing slogans and logos***

In the majority of focus groups the slogans suggested within the current topic generated an exchange of ideas and an active discussion. Upon hearing the phrase participants wanted to discuss it out loudly. There were cases when the assessment of one participant influenced the other, people were sitting next to each other and were peeking to see how the others made their assessment.

Ideas expressed during the discussion of logos are especially noteworthy. They attest to the fact that although our interlocutors basically agreed with the slogans they still rarely succeeded in shifting from the issues that were a matter of their basic concern: life is hard, no money right at that moment, no job, no income, so the issue of firewood cannot be cut out from that context and transferred onto a different level. It could be said that the assessments of the participants referred not to the slogans themselves but rather to those conditions in their lives at that precise moment that were associated to the slogans. They come to prove the main perception of the population that the forest is indeed very important, even vitally important, however first of all there is no way to avoid utilizing that vitally important forest, secondly the main “enemy” of the forest are the residents of the settlements neighboring the forests. Besides this generalized approach we can also distinguish the approaches of the population of different settlements. Especially those of Shikahogh and Gosh settlements adjacent to the “reserve forest”, where the accesses of the population to the forest and possibilities to utilize it are significantly limited and who generally find that those limitations are exaggerated and are set out bypassing the vital needs of the nearby population. They found that the concepts underlying the suggested slogans are slightly exaggerated.

M2 - With respect to the slogan “*Forest devastation leads to a collapse*” many have out loudly said “I agree”, however, for instance, women of Shikahogh believe that forest devastation does not harm people significantly. “There is no forest in Sisian. Are the people there ruined? No!” Shikahogh residents believe that what really harms them is the hyper-cautious attitude towards the forest, which hinders the fulfillment of population needs with respect to forest utilization. Dilijan leaders stated that “a couple of trees” cut by the residents of forest neighborhood would

not result in forest devastation; the reason of forest devastation or our ruination is not the firewood, but disafforestation for industrial purposes, in the male focus group they found that “the question is a bit strict, as a couple of wood pieces will not lead to devastation, but of course it is true; if the forests are devastated we will be too.” In Gosh women gently agreed: “It is true, if the forest is devastated we will collapse”, however the leaders were rather rough “Now what? Shall we collapse first? And what do you suggest, how shall we live? We have no gas, we can’t afford gas.” In the same Gosh the men were incredulous and each of them in a different wording either expressed their doubts with respect to forest devastation or agreed that the devastation of people is more alarming.

- Well, that’s what they say, but we have not seen that.
- If that is the case, only nomad is left.
- The bird in the hand is better than a pie in the sky... If that is the case, if it devastates; if you are collapsing let it devastate with you.
- Don’t know if it’ll devastate but you certainly do.
- I collapse either way.
- You ought to use every chance not to collapse. Right now I’ll cut a tree not to collapse then I’ll see.

Women in Azatamout agreed with the slogan, men were incredulous; “It is not a must that if one thing ruins the other also will.”

Men of Berd, who mainly are entrepreneurs and are involved in wood business, disagreed: “Is that to say that if we collapse and the forest remains preserved that is better? It is better if the forest devastates, the man can create a new one.” At the same time the leaders of Berd reaffirmed; “Of course it is true. That is the reason why our population runs away now, looking for a new place for living, because to live here is already dangerous for one’s life.”

M3 - The slogan “*The forest helped Armenians during the war and was damaged. Now it is time for reforestation*” caused less discussion. Almost all the participants agreed that the forest should be restored. Women of Azatamout village in Tavoush marz reaffirmed bitterly that: “There is no need even to talk about that. They have cut so many trees; nothing is left.” Only in Shikahogh village people considered forest restoration superfluous. Shikahogh women confirmed that during the war they were hiding in the forest for a couple of days, nevertheless they considered that the forest in fact was not damaged and that there is no need to talk about its restoration. Shikahogh leaders also found that basically of course forests must be restored, but that that could not concern their forest. It was not damaged and now being a reserve forest it is perfectly maintained.

M4 - “*The Forest is not wood, it is our wealth.*”

Everywhere, almost in all focus groups the participants to a different extent objected to this statement: “The forest is also wood.” As was defined by Shikahogh female focus group “a forest is also wood, and that is what makes it our wealth.” Their main objection was that without the wood they would not be able to live at all, they have no alternative heating sources, at least as far as financially affordable fuel is concerned: “Why don’t you ask how should these villagers live without wood.” Dilijan men suggested: “We agree with the statement. But change it, mention not only wood, otherwise it seems as if the forest for us is only wood.”



Men of Berd “It is our wealth, but we are too poor to be so rich. Maintaining a forest is the privilege of the rich.”

As for Shnogh here women-participants inverted the slogan “Our forests are the wealth of the others / they meant those who cut the forest and are not residents of the village/, then why not let the forests be woods for us.”

*M5 “By cutting down the forest one loses everything acquiring very little”*

Basically women in Shikahogh agreed with the statement; however they found that if it was about partial cutting down of their forest one did not lose or lost very little with the possibility to acquire land instead.

Gosh women “Well, we live on the account of the forest”

Azatomout men: “It would be better if we had jobs instead of carrying wood from the forest; people would use gas.”

Berd men: “What we have gained so far are our lives, is that too little?”

*M6 – „Do not cut off the branch you are sitting on”*

Shikahogh, women: “We love nature very much, we love the forest, but without the wood we can’t live”

Gosh, men -“It depends on what the branch serves for”

Azatomout, women- “You have already cut it”; “It is not we who has cut it, the cutter did, and we brought his branch.”

Shnogh, men-“But it is not we who cut the branch we are sitting on, the others do.”

As is evident from the ideas expressed by the participants during the discussions they mainly agree with the concepts underlying the slogans /with few exceptions proving the opposite/, however they believe that they live in crisis situation and in that case commonly accepted truths can be reviewed. Central to this is that when in the balance is their current life, which is extremely vulnerable and insecure, then “the Forest” can wait until the life of the people gets better. This very phenomenon was expressed in the assessment, which contains mainly high marks.

The table below represents the assessment of the slogans by a 1-5 points scale.

Composition and number of participants by focus groups	M2: Forest devastation leads to a collapse	M3: Forest helped Armenians during the war and was damaged. Now it is time for reforestation	M4: Forest is not wood, it is our wealth.	M5: By cutting down the forest one loses everything acquiring very little	M6: Do not cut off the branch you are sitting on
Kapan-leaders-5	4, 4, 5, 3, 3	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	4, 3, 5, 5, 5	4, 4, 5, 3, 3	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Women-5	2, 2, 3, 1, 1	3, 3, 5, 2, 3	5, 4, 3, 4, 3	4, 1, 4, 1, 1	5, 5, 1, 1, 1
Men-6	1, 2, 4, 1, 1, 4	5, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 2, 4	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Artsvanik-leaders-5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Women-6	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 5	5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 5
Men-5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 3, 5, 4, 5	5, 3, 3, 3, 5	3, 3, 5, 4, 5	4, 5, 5, 5, 5
Shikahogh-leaders-4	5, 3, 5, 1	5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5
Women-6	5, 5, 1, 1, 1, 1	4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	3, 2, 3, 1, 3, 3	5, 5, 5, 1, 5, 5
Men-6	5, 5, 5, 4, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4	4, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3	5, 5, 5, 4, 5, 5
Dilijan-leaders-5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 4, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Women-5	4, 4, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 4, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Men-5	4, 5, 3, 3, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	4, 4, 4, 5, 4	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Gosh-leaders-6	4, 3, 4, 5, 4, 5	5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 5	4, 4, 3, 2, 4, 4	4, 4, 3, 2, 4, 4	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Women-5	4, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 4, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	4, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Men-5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	3, 5, 5, 5, 5	4, 5, 5, 5, 5
Azatomout leaders-5	4, 3, 5, 5, 5	5, 3, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	4, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Women-9	5, 5, 5, 3, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Men-5	5, 5, 5, 5, 1	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 1	5, 5, 5, 5, 1	5, 5, 5, 5, 1
Berd-leaders-6	5, 5, 5, 4, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 4	5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Women-7	5, 1, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 4, 5, 5, 4, 4	5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Men-4	3, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5	3, 4, 5, 5	2, 4, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5
Shnogh-leaders-5	5, 5, 5, 4, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 4, 5	5, 5, 4, 3, 3	5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Women-6	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 3	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5
Men-6	4, 4, 5, 4, 4, 4	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4	4, 4, 5, 4, 4, 4	5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5

As for the assessment of the statement: “It is absolutely alright if I cut off a couple of trees to heat my home” it was introduced twice, once at the beginning and then after the discussion of deforestation damages and their consequences, i.e. landslides, degradation of soil and desertification, lack of water resources, air pollution etc. Both the first and especially the second time when assessing the statement the participants suggested that before asking that question we should first of all try to learn about their hard living conditions; unemployment, no income generation from agriculture, shortage of money, no alternative fuel “When in winter your child is freezing everything is permitted.” In trying to justify limited/moderate cutting down of trees people assert that people always have used and will use natural resources, however it should be done within reasonable limits/ in a moderate way. At the same time the statement that residents of the settlements in forest neighborhoods are far not indifferent towards the forest but that the forest was exposed to aggressive exploitation and continues to be partially exploited by the “oligarchs” is brought forward as a counter argument. The “couple of trees” cut down by the residents because of their hard living conditions are in no comparison with the barbarian attitude manifested by the “oligarchs”, and on the given background what they do of course cannot be considered unfair.

It is noteworthy that despite the fact that the majority of responses “allow” the usage of firewood and even cutting down the trees, the majority of the participants feel responsibility for the forest, which briefly can be expressed through the statement of Shikahogh young people, who said: “If it were not for us, not a single forester would be able to maintain the forest. If it is fire we put it down, if it must be cleaned we clean it. It is our forest.” Some approaches expressed at that part of the discussion are presented below without comments, and are followed by the assessment of the statement, expressed in 5 point scale. The assessment completely corresponds to the approaches. During the first discussion Kapan Leaders’ group came to the conclusion that the trees ought to be cut down but selectively, without harming healthy and environmentally significant trees.

Kapan, women “Five, five, you can cut even five trees. The one who cuts should know which trees to cut. The villager understands.”

Artsvanik, leaders – In case there is a possibility to get another fuel and the rural residents are able to pay, the trees should not be cut.

Artsvanik, men - Yes, it is Ok, but if we do cut a tree they will write millions of indictments on us. Even if we cut a dried tree they will charge as with an enormous fine. Yes, a dried tree must be cut down and a new one should be planted instead. Here if we by chance cut down, say, two of those trees at the same place thousand trees grow in a couple of years. And it is useful for the nature. What we do is useful, if they let us cut down the trees by sectors.

Shikahogh women - I strongly agree, not just agree.

Shikahogh men - Of course it is acceptable, if I could put 6, I would do that.

Dilijan women - “I will mark five, of course he must cut, he can’t let his kid freeze, can he? “I’ll mark five.”, “I’ll mark five.””No I’ll not put two, I’ll mark four.”

Moderator – Ok, but imagine if all of you go and cut down your couple of trees.

-At that moment he already forgets about everything, so that his kid is in warm, the kid wouldn’t let him think about the future.

-Moderator- What if there is no forest?

-We will die of starvation.

- I say, no, when there is no forest, they will make up their minds and they will definitely invent something.

-Ok then they shouldn't raise the prices for gas that much for the forest to remain preserved.

Gosh leaders were discussing for quite a while that their response could harm them and they could be held responsible, eventually one of them summed up "the trees should not be cut down."

- If you don't cut how will you heat your home?

- Cutting down and wood waste is not the same thing. If you collect and bring the waste it is different, but if you cut the trees it is a shame.

- And what if there is no wood waste?

- If you don't cut how do you heat your home?

- I have already answered that question. If there is no wood waste, and there are no job places, then of course we are going to cut down the trees. One or two cut trees for every villager, one thousand residents. If you cut down two trees, it is to say the forest devastates, I have no other name for that.

- Even if right now they slightly loosen the control, all of the trees will be cut down.

- Let me say briefly, if the resident is freezing he doesn't see anything else, if his child, his family feel cold, he doesn't care for the forest either.

During the discussion Gosh women agreed that one or two trees can damage the whole forest, and the forest is very important for them. "Emmer grows there, flowers, we make use of that, the cows eat the acorn, and the emmer, too" however eventually they agreed with a young woman "I will cut, if my children are cold, I will." At the end this consent was expressed through the following statement: today if someone does not cut the trees down it is only because they are afraid to be fined. Generally speaking, trees must be both cut down and planted, but "within reasonable limits."

Azatamout women - "We are not saying let us go and cut a healthy tree." "For the sake of the child we will do anything."

Berd men - "We could mark 20 as well, it is perfectly alright. Do you expect us not to cut a single tree when wood is being taken away from our forests in hectares? "

Shnogh leaders - "The forest is already devastated; the cutting or not cutting of the rural residents will not change anything."

Shnogh, women - "It is no good if anyone is allowed to cut a tree. But the forestry must cut the superfluous trees and sell it to the residents at a low price. And they should give it to the elderly and the poor for free. Besides the neighboring villages to all the rest they can sell it a higher price, but all we have is this forest so we should get it cheap."

Shnogh, men - "The villager would not damage the forest. They have always felled, but nothing happened to the forest from that. But there are people living in the village, they are not villagers, go and ask them."

## *Second Discussion*

Kapan leaders - “Now they talk all the time about global heating. I suspect that there is a global heating and that it is the consequence of human impact. It is not an anthropogenic disaster but rather a natural one, and on this account a lot of money can be earned. It is very wrong now to suggest stopping utilizing the nature. People cannot pay for gas, they ought to cut trees. If a person needs he will go and cut the trees down again. My grandfather... there are trees here, right? he would not cut them, he takes me by the hand and on a donkey we went far away and cut the oldest tree which was about to be out of order any way. That should be the approach; to teach how to do it correctly and not to forbid.”

Kapan, women - It is Ok, it is to heat your home... But if you cut it so that not to damage the forest, then it is OK.”

Artsvanik, leaders - “A normal person cannot answer this question in a peaceful manner. If you say yes, it is Ok, they will think we are not normal, but it will not be true, why is it not allowed?”

Artsvanik men – “We will cut those that have dried; there are a lot of dried trees. I will fell the one which is not giving any crop. But if there isn't a dry one, I will cut the wet one. You can't find dry trees everywhere. What can I do, should I die?”

Shikahogh women - “If you cut one, then other trees start to grow just next to it. We should cut little, but without that it is impossible.”

Dilijan, men - “By all means. If there is no other way to heat the home it is a must. When people establish a settlement they try to chose a location either by the river or by the forest. The forest has always been means of existence for people. They bred cattle. All around Sevan villages were established and settled, because all their hope was with the water. There are no other means for living there. They will bring wood from Dilijan I will exchange it for fish, I will heat my home and he will eat fish. The wood is devastated because of massive deforestation. What is a rural resident, how much firewood can he use? First of all not all of them will use, only some 30%, the forest will not be damaged by that.”

Gosh leaders - “Who wants to cut down the forest? None of the villagers. But there is no alternative, they need to make their home warm, that's it. The forest has its own control, it is not just a body, it can't be taken and destroyed. This forest will go on for centuries, right? If it reached us it means it will go on after us for a while right? But today we think how to live, and how to survive.”

- He is right, you say, it is a forest... and that village, say, has five thousand residents, and a five hundred hectares of forest, trees, why not to cut and take home.

- One doesn't know what to say, yes or no.

- Well you really don't know yes or no.

Gosh women - “We don't want to cut, but we will cut. We will cut, but we are afraid.”

Gosh men - “I have assessed, and even put five.” “If someone is involved in a saw business or something that is one thing, but if the need made him do that, then it is acceptable.”

Azatamout women - “I don’t agree. The wood is ashes, dirt, but there are no other means, no way to afford gas, so we have to find a way to get firewood.” “I would prefer to go and borrow some money to pay for gas, than to cut down the trees; the air will be polluted, in summer it is so hot that the springs drain, when we did that in those years it was because we were in need.”

Berd leaders - This is really very sad; if everyone cuts a couple of trees... Right now at night the trunks leave here loaded with wood. In fact they ruin our homes. And Berd residents watch that but can’t do anything about that. So he will also want to cut one or two trees. If it stays with us, we might even not cut trees at all. But now, in the given conditions, of course it is Ok to cut trees in order to heat the homes. But only if there are no more wood wastes in the forest.

Shnogh leaders - “Our lives are collapsing and you speak of two trees.”

Composition and number of participants by focus groups	„It is absolutely alright if I cut down a couple of trees to heat my home.”	
	First response	Second response
Kapan leaders - 5	5, 5, 1, 4, 3	5, 5, 1, 3, 3
Women - 6	1, 1, 3, 1, 2, 2	2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 1
Men - 6	3, 4, 4, 3, 5, 4	3, 3, 5, 3, 5, 4
Artsvanik leaders - 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 4, 3, 4, 5
Women - 6	4, 3, 4, 5, 5, 4	5, 3, 4, 5, 5, 5
Men - 5	3, 4, 3, 3, 4	2, 2, 1, 1, 1
Shikahogh leaders - 4	5, 5, 5, 5	5, 5, 5, 5
Women - 6	1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1	2, 2, 2, 1, 4, 4
Men - 6	3, 4, 3, 3, 5, 5	5, 4, 5, 3, 5, 5
Dilijan leaders - 5	5, 3, 3, 2, 1	5, 3, 3, 3, 1
Women - 5	5, 5, 4, 3, 2	4, 4, 4, 3, 2
Men - 5	4, 4, 4, 5, 5	4, 4, 5, 5, 5
Gosh leaders - 6	5, 4, 5, 5, 2, 1	5, 4, 5, 5, 3, 1
Women - 5	1, 5, 1, 1, 1	1, 1, 1, 1, 1
Men-5	5, 5, 5, 1, 4	5, 5, 5, 4, 4
Azatamut leaders - 5	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5, 3, 1, 3, 1
Women - 9	3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1	3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1
Men - 5	1, 5, 5, 5, 5	1, 5, 5, 5, 5
Berd leaders - 6	4, 3, 4, 1, 3, 2	4, 3, 4, 1, 1, 1
Women - 7	4, 5, 3, 1, 4, 3, 3	4, 4, 3, 1, 2, 3, 3
Men - 4	5, 4, 5, 1	5, 4, 4, 1
Shnogh leaders - 5	4, 3, 4, 4, 1	4, 2, 4, 5, 1
Women - 6	3, 3, 4, 5, 1, 2	3, 3, 4, 4, 1, 2
Men - 6	4, 4, 4, 3, 4, 3	4, 4, 4, 3, 4, 3

It is natural that the first and second responses to the statement “It is absolutely alright if I cut down a couple of trees to heat my home.” differ mainly among Shnogh and Gosh village and partially among Berd urban village residents. At the same time in the latter case two participants from the leader group have reduced their points from “3,” and “2” to “1” point probably influenced by the bleak prospects of the forest that they found out about during the discussion. In Azatamout village where the role of the forest in the lives of villagers is rather significant, and taking to consideration







that the village has gas supply the overwhelming 5,5,5,5,5 assessment of five leaders in the first case has changed and equaled to 5,3,1,3,1. In Shikahogh the leaders from the very beginning agreed that “It is absolutely alright if I cut down a couple of trees to heat my home” and in both instances their assessment remained unchanged- 5,5,5,5. However women and men, who at the beginning were very restrained in their assessment-1,1,1,1,1 to 3,4,3,3,5,5, after the discussion, during which numerous problems and hardships were identified and the difficulties of using the forest for firewood detected, the second time gave higher points, thus agreeing with the statement that “It is absolutely alright if I cut down a couple of trees to heat my home.”

All of their second assessment points were higher than the first ones, correspondingly 2,2,2,1,4,4 and 5,4,5,3,5,5. However it should be mentioned that Shikahogh forests in fact were not deforested, or were to a very little extent. The residents of the village have never seen and do not realize the direct dangers of deforestation. At the same time Shikahogh is a reserve-forest and the villagers who are not very numerous, find that the forest being a reserve zone makes their relationship with the forest more complicated. The growing forest has very closely approached the village, in fact “entering the village” and “taking up” part of the agricultural lands. Because of the reserve area the economic activities of the villagers have become more difficult to accomplish, and the people are not at all against “slightly cutting it down” especially that they have a great need of firewood given that the only alternative fuel in the village is expensive power.

In Gosh also after the discussion the approval of the participants of the statement “it is absolutely alright if I cut down a couple of trees to heat my home” has increased when assessing for the second time. Gosh is also situated next to a reserve forest. The forest hinders cattle breeding, as the road to the pastures passes through the forest, and the cattle is not allowed to enter the reserve forest; there is no gas supply in the village, and the participants do not see any opportunities for alternative heating sources and again, the population which is tired of the problems caused by the reserve forest is not against slightly “cutting it down”.

As for the logos, besides the Coat of the RA the rest of the symbols were mainly unfamiliar to the participants of the discussions. In some groups the participants recognized the logo of the World Bank, in the others of the Council of Europe; some of the participants have seen the logo of the World Wildlife Fund. None of the participants, including the foresters and environmentalists recognized either the logo of FLEG, or of International Union for Conservation Nature.

The table below represents the opinions expressed with respect to the logos, in case they were expressed.

Focus group composition	FLEG 	Coat of RA 	EC 	WB 	International Union for Conservation of Nature 	WWF 
Kapan leaders	-	The Arms of Armenia	European Union	The world fund	-	It is the Panda. They may say the Shikahogh director is driving a car with a panda stuck on it.
Kapan women	-	It is the Arms of Armenia	-	-	-	They show that bear on the TV
Kapan men	-	-	-	The top of the world	-	-the symbol of China - A type of a bear- they are probably doing some environmental protection stuff.
Artsvanik leaders	-	It is the Coat of Arms of Armenia	-	-	-	-Chinese borrowings
Artsvanik women	-	-	-	-	-	
Artsvanik men	-	-	-	-	-	-Isn't it an animal registered in the Red Book? - Something connected with youth... -Sports stuff, must be
Shikahogh leaders	-	The coat of arms	-This is the flag of the Council of Europe:	This one must be connected with environmental protection, this globe.	-	-That one is our wildlife protection something, that one we know. -What was the name of this animal? -Panda



Shikahogh women	-	The coat of arms	They have it on the Turkish flag as well	Euro bank sign or something like that.	-	-This is the sign of our reserve forest/ - It is the Panda. It is Panda bear; it is registered in the Red Book, endangered...
Shikahogh, men	-	The coat of arms of Armenia	Of the Council of Europe	-	Panther symbol	That one is a Panda
Dilijan leaders	Forest protection organization	It is the Coat of Arms of Armenia	-	The World Bank	-	Non-Governmental organization for the protection of Wildlife
Dilijan women	-	It is the Coat of Arms of Armenia	-	-	-	-
Dilijan men	-	Armenian coat of arms	Council of Europe”	The logo of the UN	-	We have seen it on TV
Gosh leaders	-	Our coat of arms	-	It is the World Bank	-	We have seen the logo on the car
Gosh men	-	The Armenian coat of arms	First they identified it as the flag of the USA, then after asking from each other called it “The flag of Europe”	It is the World Bank	-	-
Gosh women	-	-	-	-	-	“This one we have seen...this...something like protection of pandas...”
Azatamout, leaders	-	The Armenian coat of arms	Isn't it is the logo of the Council of Europe?	This one is maybe the UN	-	-

Azatamout women	-	-	-	The globe is familiar	-	Of an Olympics
Azatamout men	-	The Armenian coat of arms	Council of Europe	Wolzvagen sign	-	Asa Ice-cream –the bear:
Berd, leaders	-	The Armenian coat of arms	-	World Bank	-	It is probably an organization protecting the animals
Berd, women	-	It is the coat of arms of Armenia	-	-	All of us know this symbol, and we have a very positive attitude towards them it is UNISEF they come here	-
Berd, men	-	It is the coat of arms of Armenia	-	-	-	-
Shnogh, leaders	--	It is the coat of arms of Armenia	-	-	-	-
Shnogh, women		Our coat of arms	-	-	-	-
Shnogh, men	-	It is the coat of arms of Armenia	-	-	-	-

Although they did not recognize the signs some of the participants of our discussions, especially among the leaders were familiar both with the World Bank and the Council of Europe and the European Union. They were also well aware that there are both local and international environmental organizations. And it was the leaders' focus group that had the most incredulous attitude towards these organizations. "They approach us from the position of an instructor. We have our national features and peculiarities: We are neither Europe, nor Asia. Our peculiarities are separate, different. We are going towards Europe, European values, but I don't accept European values anymore. The role that we expect them to play they don't play it" /Dilijan men/; "They come here for their own benefit. /Berd/ "If there is activity- it is interests, here you need to know in advance what interest do they have." /Kapan/.

The main reason for such an incredulous attitude towards international organizations is as the residents believe, favorable attitude towards the election processes: "They prefer that we have authorities that they can treat the way they want. As for the elections, do you believe that they did not know that the elections were falsified? Now that some years have passed they have just started to talk about that, they link 1<sup>st</sup> of March to that. When they came and participated didn't they know about that at that time?"

During the discussions to our objections that there are extremely humanistic organizations, and that their benefit is also humanistic, and that there are people who pursue humanistic aims the participants were repeatedly coming to the conclusion that even people and organizations, which truly pursue humanistic aims change. "Well, these programs are financed by someone, aren't they? They get a salary, don't they? Environmental organizations eventually turn into political ones, for example the Union of Greens, which has already started to take political decisions, here already the environmental aspect you have mentioned plays a little role. Let me put it this way, The Greens you have mentioned they get money as if to realize a project, but how do they realize it?"

Although they don't believe and don't really trust international organizations still some consider that "well, they still bring some help".

### ***Theme 3: Communication Channels***

The settlements that we have worked at have a different level of access to information. The main source of information is the TV. In fact in all the settlements where we have had discussions people follow the news first of all on the main public channel- H1, which is practically accessible to everyone. However the most trustworthy commentary to the news is considered to be "SHANT TV" channel with its program "Horizon," in particular. "Shant TV" is followed by "Armenia" TV channel and it could be said that these three channels form main flows of information. In Kapan there are two local TV channels, which have a quite wide audience both in the town of Kapan and in the majority of the neighboring rural settlements. The regional center of Tavush Ijevan also has its local TV channel.

However listening to the news does not imply trusting the transmitted information. "People don't trust anyone. Today they say one thing on TV; in reality we see a totally different thing. Nothing coincides" /Gosh, leaders/. Nevertheless the information transmitted by TV does cause certain interest and if needed people try to verify that information. For example when we started to discuss the sizes of the fines, or when we asked if they would trust the information that

“Hayantar” decided to eliminate the prices for forest wastes and give them out for free, if they hear it on TV, many have replied that they would go and ask the forester and check it out and only after that they would believe. Most of all they would trust the forester. We find that when giving forest related information or introducing issues referring to forest utilization to the population it would be more expedient to do it in the presence of the forester. When discussing this sort of issues the presence of the forester will be more confidence building than of the village mayor, or even more than that of a representative of an NGO.

As a matter of fact radio is no more a source of information. The wired radio network has ceased to exist. People in rural settlements rarely read newspapers, neither do they in towns. In fact those who do read newspapers are the people interested in politics and other topics covered by newspapers very rarely are looked through or become a topic for a discussion in the province.

Shant TV, which seems to enjoy the trust of the majority of population, is facing problems with high and low profile representatives of local self governance bodies. “That Shant man, what was his name, that Nver, he stood up and said princelings. If I see him I’ll beat the hell out of him, what is that princeling supposed to mean? What he thinks all these heads of communities are? So what have we turned into, then? All the community leaders that there are in Armenia are upset by him. He shouldn’t be just beaten he should be killed. Who he thinks he is?” /Azatamout, leaders/: There is a possibility that the news transmitted through Shant TV might be boycotted by local self government bodies.

Town and Village mayors not always find necessary to inform the population about certain issues. In some cases this can be explained by negligence, nonchalance, in other cases by laziness, sometimes by the insufficient level of literacy of local self-government leaders and at last, most probably, by the desire to conceal certain information. In one of the villages under study when discussing the awareness of Forest governance in the focus group, the village mayor claimed that he was aware of the plan and that he even had it. When we asked him to tell the rest of the group about the plan he said: “The forest planning map is not something I am allowed to show to everyone.” And when we asked him who forbade him to show it the village mayor answered by bringing arguments of a general nature: “What will change if the villager knows?” We continued to disagree by saying: “But the forest planning information is not a state secret, is it? This information is available on the internet and anybody can learn about that. Shouldn’t the residents of your village know what is Hayantar planning to do with the forests of Armenia?” etc. The village mayor’s counter argument was that if Hayantar wanted to inform the population about something, it had the possibility to do that, they can inform via TV. Our impression was that in reality the mayor did not know even about the existence of the governance plan.

As it seems in towns and villages local TV channels enjoy more trust, especially when it comes to the coverage of the local events. There is always someone familiar that works at that TV channel and through these people it is always possible to ask and find out the credibility of the news.

The other formal way of distributing information is announcements. Usually these are stuck in the corridors of the city /village municipality and most of the time people do read them. The news that are relevant to them and interest them later are distributed orally. Most important announcements are also stuck at the entrance to the local post office and shops.

If a discussion should be held regarding the forests the majority of the population and especially men would like to be present at that meeting. The issue of forests and firewood is of vital importance for many and men are always interested in forest related matters. The issue that causes most interest is the size and form of fines. Obviously in case of being introduced in a comprehensive wording the Forest governance plan itself will be of great interest. If the discussion will be motivation prompting then the residents will want to participate in its formation and elaboration.

Also if materials referring to environmental and forest protection are expressed in a comprehensible and attractive way in a form of a brochure will be read also if presented in a form of a brochure. When publishing this sort of materials it is more preferable to include examples which refer to a familiar location/terrain.

Evidently a series of TV programs held in an atmosphere of a debate could be popular and could be transmitted all over the republic. This could be a show, but localized as much as possible. Probably the participation of people who are well known and trustworthy locally would be more preferable. We have come across such a person in Berd, who was capable of “covering” the focus group of Berd leaders that in fact included very strong people, by his knowledge and charm. This person experienced deep pain because of all the things happening in their region and he did not try to conceal that pain, he also managed to show his emotions and knowledge without demonstrating unnecessary artistry skills. The presence of this type of people at the shows could make the shows popular and ensure a wide audience. This can be foresters, doctors, judges, village mayors, or simply educated people who know the subject. In any case it is of utmost importance that the conversation instead of being theoretical or generalized is strongly localized. The most successful and localized programs can be repeated in local TV channels.

#### ***Theme 4: Identification of main image vectors, campaign partners.***

Within the topic of our discussion both foresters that are familiar from the community and the village mayor, as well as the staff of the village municipality enjoy certain extent of trust. The information that is given by them is considered to be the most trustworthy. However the people are always anxious that the information given by governance bodies is always incomplete and make efforts to verify the issues that are most important from other, different sources.

If biodiversity and environmental protection seminars are to be held, then it is more preferable not to organize them through local NGOs. NGOs in general and local NGOs in particular have lost the trust of the population. They are perceived as means to earn money and not as institutions that are interested in real problems of the people and aiming at finding ways to settle those problems. Many have mentioned that often when holding a discussion it is rather the imitation of that discussion. The NGOs bring together their relatives, leaders of other NGOs their close friends and in fact stage a performance.

The same phenomenon is also attributed to the governor's offices and local self-governance bodies. At one of our discussions we came across a perfect description of the type of discussions organized by the mentioned structures for the population “Do you know what happens at the discussion? There is, say, the municipality and there are its employees: The head of the department enters and says, that there is going to be a meeting at this and this hour and this and this question will be discussed, you, you, you and you must go. Go, be present but don't spoil

everything. You know what this „spoiling” means. Any unnecessary conversation there means losing the job. Therefore he must go there, sit silently and ensure the presence. Not being present also means quitting the job, losing it. Going there and being present is compulsory, so that they see that the entire chairs are occupied. The activity goes on very well, everybody goes home. And the people, the common citizens are very far from all that.”

Overall it could be said that seminars are no more attractive. Besides the above described performances, the organization of seminars and especially of trainings in the recent years implies gathering the permanent active group of participants, who are locally more or less known as participants of all seminars. Such occurrences also have their impact on the creation of an atmosphere of distrust. As a matter of course, men of the villages do not participate in seminars, and middle aged active women are “fed up” with the seminars, where well trained activists speak good words and develop clever ideas which have no connection with the real life that the people live. In Artsvanik we were even asked as they put it “Do whatever you want, but just don’t organize a seminar”. This does not mean that seminars will not be productive. This simply indicates that those who organize the seminars must be well aware of the local life and possess all the necessary information, must be at place where the seminar will be held a couple of days before the seminar, meet the people, talk to them and adjust the discussions by their form and contents to the settlement in question. It is of utmost importance that the heads of local self-governance bodies and foresters are present at the discussions of this topic. They must participate but they should not organize the seminars. They are only one of the sides of the discussion. Obviously if at the very first meeting the participants become well motivated and interested, they will take part also in the following seminars, and they will do so not for the sake of simply being present but because they will be interested in the contents. The seminars and especially the trainings by no means must be carried out in the teacher-pupil relationship style. Only the seminars on law awareness in case of extreme necessity can be held in such a manner, although in terms of the style this is also not desirable. Today people even doubt whether awareness is necessary “You know your rights, but you can’t exercise them. Not in any way you can exercise them.” However the majority still find that being informed is better and it is important to contribute to the awareness of the people.

I think that for different social layers different seminars could be held. The presence of active and business-oriented people frustrates passive people with low income. In any case that task shouldn’t be fulfilled by governance bodies. People are deeply convinced that governance bodies tend to “hush up the issues.”

Generally speaking when organizing discussions on site it is extremely important to tell about the precedents and/or facts and to build the discussion based on that. In this respect foresters, woodman, judges that have considered forest related cases and cases on firewood, village mayors, biology teachers, and of course respected and honorable people who “emerge on site” could be good partners. During our study we have come across such people: a banker, a member of the Council of Elders, a doctor, master of wood processing, parquet producer, environmental protection employer, hairdresser, shopkeeper, and a constructor. This type of people come forward if the work carried out on site is motivated and committed. We have also met foresters, woodman, environmentalists, teachers that by no means should be invited to the discussions.

## ***Conclusion***

1. In all the settlements under study, both urban and rural, the majority of the population make use of the forest products since almost early spring till late autumn. The forest is utilized both to gather forest food /fruit, herbs, berries, nuts etc./, as well as to store fodder for the cattle, sometimes also as a pasture, for land cultivation / in the areas with limited lands some people use the wood clearings to sow potatoes, beans and cabbage/. Forest products are of vital importance especially for the population of poorer settlements. The forest is also used as a recreation zone, and for environmental and aesthetic education of pupils. However the forest is most valuable as a source for winter firewood at the same time this benefit of the forest by the level of significance in the settlements where there is alternative fuel /gas/ yields little as compared to settlements without gas supply.
2. In the recent 3-4 years forest logging has decreased significantly in the settlements neighboring the forest. In the total volume of firewood the volume of firewood accumulated from wood wastes and forest sanitation has increased. As the residents claim today forest logging for industrial purposes holds the first place in the total volume, in which however the population of neighboring forests either does not take part at all or is involved only as hired woodmen. The number of the latter reduces more and more, the job is hard and dangerous and the wage they get for it very low. In fact people don't know to what extent forest logging for industrial purposes is legal. In those rare cases when in the settlements neighboring forests there are separate individuals who deal with wood processing /in the settlements under study Berd, Dilijan, Shnogh/ out materials attest to the fact that the real volumes of wood for several times exceed the volume that they have the legal right to use.
3. People pay for the wood wastes and wood accumulated from forest sanitation and for the majority of them it is unacceptable and incomprehensible that they pay for gathering the wood wastes. They find that by gathering wood wastes and fallen trees they clean the forest, and that it is useful for the forest and they don't understand why they should pay for that. "Such an approach was partially shaped in the Soviet period: "The wind blows, breaks, crushes and cuts everything. Under the communists the people would get paid to go and clean the forest, bring that wood and burn it, to open the field, the roads, so that it is clean, so that in case of a fire there is a route for the people to go and put it down. Now it is absolutely impossible, all that has vanished." It is noteworthy that none of the participants of the discussions new for sure where the decision concerning the payment against collecting the forest wastes was made and in fact what was the price per one cubic meter of forest wastes. In different settlements the perception of the residents of the value of forest wastes and the volume that they are allowed to gather is different. The amount that is mentioned most often is two cubic meters. No one has seen a document which would define the right to gather and use forest wastes or firewood together with the permitted amount and prices. The forester who gives permission to gather wood wastes decides himself where they should be collected from: "The foresters tell the people to bring the wood wastes from the far parts of the forest, so the people get the wood wastes from the gorges... Eventually it costs very expensive."
4. The majority of the participants from the settlements under study has a very vague idea about the principles of forest managements and as a matter of fact do not know about the forest management plan. In general they know the name "Hayantar" but instead they continue to use the word "forestry," which is more familiar to them. Women do not know at all what the legal

function of “Hayantar” is; they suppose that it is a body that they should make payments to in order to get the permission to gather wastes. Men and of course the members of leaders focus groups are better informed however their knowledge is also fragmented. They consider that “Hayantar” is to clean the forest, take care of forest development and overlook forest-man relationships. Yet some people are deeply convinced that real, factual forest management is adjusted to market logics and not to calculation of vital functions of the forest and forest management plans.

5. Without knowing, seeing or criticizing forest management plans, the participants of our discussions however suggest to plan forest utilization /as a matter of fact to manage the forest/. Most of them see the possibility for that on the example of their communities and within their communities. They find that communities neighboring forests better know „their” forests and they will manage together with their village mayor to plan the preservation, the protection, the development and the utilization of the forest. Many especially men and leaders find that local self-governance bodies are more transparent, that the population one way or another gets informed about the decisions made and that community leaders have less chances to get involved in illegal deals. All of these discussions and debates eventually were gradually ending up with the conclusion that the ownership for the separate parts of the forest could be given to the communities or, which was more popular, that the neighboring communities participate in the management of the forest; the forest should remain state ownership, but the forms and opportunities for the neighboring communities to participate in the management of separate parts of the forest must be clarified and the participants should participate both in regeneration, in protection and in utilization of the forest. Governance over the forest shouldn’t be carried out by a single structure.

6. A very small part of the population understands biodiversity problems and the whole function of the forest. The most widely spread perception is that the forest ensures pure air that is saturated with oxygen. However in the groups of men and leaders there were always some participants who to some extent and sometimes rather profoundly understood the main function of the forest and were naming the problems that occurred as a result of the forest’s thinning out in their settlements and the area surrounding it /land slides, desertification, decrease in water amounts, change in biotypes. The absolute majority of the participants do not find limited utilization of forest wood dangerous if forest regeneration works are carried out simultaneously. Generally speaking they find that the population from the settlements neighboring the forest has a caring and careful attitude towards the forest and if the forest is damaged it is basically because of the careless, aggressive treatment of the “outsiders,” “strangers” who use the wood for industrial purposes.

7. The population from the settlements neighboring the forests has very limited knowledge or do not have it at all about forest preservation/conservation works and organizations. They to a certain degree are familiar with the word “ecologists” but they do not really understand the tasks of the latter. As they see it the “forester” oversees the forest, and the „ecologists” carry out additional supervision over the foresters as a result of which their opportunities to utilize the forest „go up” in prices. Forms of gathering and using forest wood are such that they feel themselves “thieves.” As in case of making the official payments people pay for 2-3 cubic meters of wood wastes and in fact they give the price for 3-5 cubic meters in cash to the forester and carry home 15-20 cubic meters of wood wastes they do not really have a clear understanding of where is the distinction line between the legal and illegal. Legal is what was allowed to do in



words/ orally by the forester with the warning to be aware of the “ecologists.” Otherwise residents pay fines the sizes and definition of which also seem arbitrary to the residents.

8. The majority of discussion participants theoretically think that everyone should be concerned with the state of the forest be it rural or urban residents. Their concern is expressed through careful attitude towards the forest, not damaging it and in case of necessity they are ready to assist forest regeneration and cleaning works. After the discussions many have agreed that in all the communities the residence would agree to work for the protection of the forest for a day or two on voluntary basis; to do cleaning, planting etc., in case it is initiated by local self-governance bodies. Yet as they found the responsibility for forest development, preservation and protection lays with the state. Forest neighboring communities are ready to assist in forest regeneration works, however are unable to protect the forest from the aggressive attitude of “outsiders.” They are not authorized to do that, and the “outsiders” as they are convinced are protected by the authorities.

9. One of the most important problems revealed in the course of the discussions is the vague, unclear understanding and lack of knowledge of the population with respect to their rights to utilize the forest in general and wood in particular. Not a single institution, be it „Hayantar”, „nature protection”, the „police”, the school, or local self-governance bodies have ever in any form carried out explanatory and/or awareness activities with regard to the rights of the population towards the forest, or in order to explain state programs; nowhere we came across an announcement or an information bulletin and neither did the residents which would tell why is one thing or another prohibited in a certain part of the forest, or in what ways people might utilize the forest, who should they be liable to or whether the community should have any responsibilities and rights with respect to the forest.

10. All the participants of our discussions unanimously found that illegal forest loggings should be punished, whoever did that. At the same time all of the participants also believed that the definition of legal-illegal and the criteria should be very distinct and clear. Many disagreed with the practice that when dealing with firewood in the forest only the official permission of „Hayantar” is considered legal. If wood wastes, fallen trees are gathered from the forest without a corresponding permission this shouldn't be considered an act liable to punishment, on the opposite it must be encouraged. However as based on the current order people pay for the wood wastes, fallen trees and „stamped” trees, so first they must pay, get the permission and only after that they can „clean” the forest, otherwise this „cleaning” will be qualified as a wrongdoing subject to punishment.

11. No one has ever heard anywhere that against the damage caused to the forest the punishment is set in form of doing works of forest regeneration. Everywhere only one type of punishment is known, i.e. fining. The size of the fines is also rather unclear. There is no understanding regarding “criminal” or “administrative” qualification of the wrongdoing.

12. The rising interest among the participants that has been observed at the discussions attests to the fact that in case skillfully organized knowledge regarding the forest function and proper treatment of the forest, as well as forest management plan can be spread among the population. Their existing knowledge is based on their individual experience regarding the forest and is largely individual.