

FLEG II Roadshows in Forest Dependent Communities of Armenia

Armenian Forests NGO

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1. Introduction

Between August and November of 2015, the “Armenian Forests” NGO organized FLEG II Roadshows in forest dependent communities in Armenia within the framework of the ENPI East FLEG II (Forest Law Enforcement and Governance) Program. The Program was supported by the Austrian Development Agency and aimed at putting in place improved forest governance arrangements through the effective implementation of the main priorities set out in the St. Petersburg Ministerial Declaration and other plans of action for the Europe and North Asia Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (ENA-FLEG) process.

The main objectives of the FLEG II Roadshows in forest-dependent communities of Armenia were to conduct a roadshow to offer information and advice to the communities on the importance of forest resources; ensure their access to decision-making, raise their sense of ownership over forests (not only as timber but as a natural wealth) and increase community confidence and trust in their ability to protect these natural resources.

Rural communities dependent on forests are most directly affected by the forest policy. They have no direct say over forest management, but they stand to benefit or lose out at different levels – environmental, social and economic – depending on how forests are treated.

Back in 2010, the first series of roadshows in forest dependent communities of Armenia were implemented by the ENPI FLEG I project. One of the key outputs of the FLEG I Roadshows held at 20 rural communities was a package of proposals (demands) and recommendations collected from local communities. A request to allow a free access to fallen wood was on the list of proposals; it was effectively communicated and further lobbied in the Government by “Hayantar” SNCO. An effect of this elaborate work and the lobby was the ***Decree on «Free Provision of Deadwood to forest dependent communities»*** ratified by the Government of Armenia in 2011. The Law provides an access of up to 8 m³ to 200 forest-dependent local communities which were hitherto charged for collection of fallen wood in their area. Another legal act ratified by the Government of Armenia which provides a direct solution to one of community appeals resulting from the FLEG I Roadshows in 2010 is the Law On ***«Tax Exemption for Activities Carried out in Rural Border Communities»***. It exempts villagers living in border communities from taxes and has also changed the staff payment rates of forest employees which did not result in their increase but rather in the scope of their work.

Apart from important changes in the forestry legislation, FLEG I Roadshows and the work with rural forest communities, informal open-air discussions with local villagers have changed their lives in other

ways as well. In the early days of visits to forest communities, local residents were overly intimidated to talk about forestry issues. Some of the most important issue raised by local residents was illegal logging in their communities and access to forest. Roadshows revealed that their level of understanding about their rights for forest use and governance is minimal. Unemployment renders the people submissive to state authority and results in the local villagers losing their voice. Program experts helped to build confidence and trust, and raise the local voice of the villagers. They were given an extensive talk explaining their legal rights for access to forestry information and for their involvement in local decision making processes. During the roadshow visits in forest communities and discussions, villagers sought FLEG's assistance to present their views and make their claims to be heard by the government. Civic activity in the forestry issues which was raised by FLEG I through extensive road-shows and face-to-face meetings with rural communities proved effective. FLEG II made it possible to see the dynamics of change in the attitude of the community members towards the forest, their dependence on the forest and get new proposals to improve forest legislation.

2. Objectives

The overarching objectives of the FLEG II Roadshows in Armenia were:

- ensure public access to decision-making,
- raise the sense of community ownership over forests not only as timber resource but as a wealth of their natural resources and
- increase community confidence and trust in their ability to protect their forest resources.
- initiate the dialogue between the government, community, local authorities and non-state stakeholders;
- present the claims of forest-dependent community members and ensure they are heard by the government;

3. Methodology

For the purpose of FLEG II Roadshows in Armenia, the FLEG vehicle, carrying experts on forestry, media and legal experts, stopped at selected village squares to discuss with villagers issues they face related to forest degradation, environmental impacts which occur as a result of human activities (soil erosion and degradation, drying up of water resources, landslides, etc) and how they can affect their community lives. Roadshows attempted to give residents the chance to meet face to face with experts who were able to provide answers to most pressing questions about forestry, the forest resources and the services it provides.

From another view point, in order to identify the current needs and develop and propose proper amendments to forestry and environmental legislation, the Roadshow experts had to «consult» local communities to discuss their role in the forest protection and management, understand their actual dependence on the forest, the current social, economic and environmental challenges they are facing and their root causes. It was an intensive information exchange where mutual learning was essential.

The following 20 forest-dependent communities were targeted by the FLEG II Roadshows in Armenia in Fall of 2015: villages Azatamut, Aknaghbyur, Hovq, Haghartsin, Gosh (Tavush Region), villages Halidzor, Tatev, Lichk, Tashtun, Tandzaver, Svarants (Syunik Region), villages Shnogh, Shamlugh, Odzun, Yeghegnut, Gargar (Lori Region), villages Aygut and Chambarak (Gegharkunik Region), town of Jermuk and Artavan village (Vayots Dzor Region). Selection of these forest dependent communities was based on two criteria: (a) communities which have not been addressed by FLEG I Roadshows in Armenia in 2010, (b) communities which were visited during the FLEG I Roadshows, but required a follow-up visit after detection of problems and recommendations made to the government to improve situation in those villages.

During meetings and public discussions in communities, a wide range of community members were targeted, including women, youth and schoolchildren, as well as invited representatives of local authorities, NGOs, and employees of environmental/forestry sector. Public discussions were open to all interested parties through publicly available announcements. The timeframe of the discussions in each forest community lasted one working day. The discussions were run in an interactive mode, where all participants could voice their opinion, which were recorded and analyzed for further submission to the Government. A strong focus was placed on the transparency of the project, for the purpose of which mass media coverage and a wider public outreach of the events was secured. The discussions were covered both by national and regional media outlets.

The main topics of discussions with communities included:

- Basics of forest management and identification of legal and/or illegal logging activities in forest, social aspects and underlying causes of logging;
- Functions of the forest;
- Forest protection activities and main institutions involved;
- Public participation in decision making process, use of non-wood forest products;
- Rights and responsibilities of community members regarding ownership of forest resources.

During each visit in forest community, the experts organized one discussion with community members and one awareness raising workshop in schools. All along, the participants of roadshows were given leaflets and factsheets with forestry information. The roadshow events in schools were organized using a presentation for schoolchildren on forest functions, climate change and nature protection. Each power point presentation was then followed by a nature documentary film with further discussions of pressing environmental problems in their community. A set of 11 brochures featuring key environmental problems in Armenia were given to the libraries of all visited village schools.

One of the important aspects of the Roadshows campaign in Armenia was the program visibility. The Roadshow team achieved maximum visibility by printing the logo of the ENPI FLEG II Program on the vehicle which was rented for travel to forest communities.

4. FLEG Roadshows Implementation

4.1 Preparatory Work

FLEG II Roadshows in forest communities of Armenia started on June 5, 2015 and ended on November 20, 2015.

Roadshow experts discussed the methodology, developed an elaborate workplan and schedule of events for running roadshows in targeted forest communities. In particular, the Roadshow expert team:

- Prepared and disseminated materials based on which the participants of the public discussions could have an idea about the current roles and responsibilities of communities and forest administration, the measures to combat illegal logging and corruption in the forest sector, the mechanisms for protection of forest and other natural resources;
- Organized branding of the FLEG II Roadshow by printing ENPI FLEG II Program disclaimer on vehicle carrying experts in order to ensure maximum visibility of the FLEG program in rural forest communities.
- Prepared video and print materials related to nature resource conservation, including forest to be disseminated in each forest community:
 - Leaflets and list of forest information to be presented to forest community members
 - 1 set of brochures «We and Our Planet» for all schoolchildren;
 - DVD copies of video films and presentations about nature and forest conservation
- For wider media coverage, expert team prepared a list of journalists to be invited to public fora and organized two round-tables in Yerevan with representatives of TV and Radio media outlets.

4.2 Road Show Implementation

The FLEG II Roadshows in Armenia was launched with a high level round table panel organized by the “Armenian Forests” where the environmental attorney and “Armenian Forests” NGO representative **Nazeli Vardanyan** introduced the results from the 2010 roadshows and how they have, or have not, been addressed. The event was given a national media coverage and was fully covered on the website of environmental information agency Ecolur (www.ecolur.org). The event was attended by the representatives of state forest institutions and forest monitoring body, international organizations, NGOs, scientists. Nazeli Vardanyan shared lessons and achievements of FLEG I Roadshows in Armenia and presented new goals of the FLEG II Roadshows. Some proposals from the 2010 roadshows have not yet been implemented, but there was positive discussion among the round table participants over the roadshow proposals for amending the import and export taxation policies for timber and significant interest in general to issues of climate change, forest management and protection, community access to non-wood forest products, forest services, community engagement in forest management plans, etc.

Azatomut and Aknaghbyur (Tavush Province). According to the approved schedule, the first Roadshow visits to rural forest communities were made in August 2015 to villages of **Azatomut** and **Aknaghbyur** of **Tavush Province**. These two neighboring communities were very different from each other. Azatomut is a former industrial community where residents worked in the



Figure 1. FLEG Roadshow participants - schoolchildren in Aknaghbyur v.

factory and were not engaged in agriculture.

Today, as the plant is closed, people are very

dependent on the neighboring forest, they cut and sell firewood and produce charcoal. The emigration level here is very high. Unlike Azatomut, members of Aknaghbyur community are actively engaged in agriculture, they use forest for gathering herbs and berries, as well as purchase firewood. Our meetings with the local residents of both Azatomut and Aknaghbyur villages showed that the people are practically isolated from the local forest management. Most of them were even unaware as to how much free fallen deadwood they are allowed to collect in the forest. When they learned it amounts to 8 m³ per year, they responded that there is no fallen wood left anyway. «Who can hike 5-6 km uphill to collect deadwood? The forest that grew nearby has been cut down and the one that came to replace it isn't fit

for heating. To preserve the forest we the government must improve our livelihood... Why burn wood if there is mainsgas? We do it because we are compelled to do it». It was not possible to identify the amount of fuelwood required by local communities per year, but the estimates which were mentioned ranged from 3 to 15 m³. Azatamut community used to be an urban-type community and was built based on the operating Bentonite processing plant. The plant is currently shut down and the main male population left the village for labour migration. Women now carry the entire brunt of supporting their families. They have no jobs, agricultural produce is not realized. Men who remained in the village are involved in logging of the forest and charcoal production and the whole village is coated in smoke. When asked about the opportunities of promoting “green” economy, for example, by developing rural tourism, collecting and processing non-wood forest products (e.g. rosehip, raspberry, blackberry etc) they replied they are willing to do it have little knowledge. They proposed to establish collection points for processing of agricultural and forest products, as well as create proper conditions to develop beekeeping practice and marketing of honey products.



Figure 2. Tatev Monastic Complex in Tatev village

In August 2015, the roadshows were organized in the following three Provinces: **Syunik Province in Halidzor, Tatev, Lichk, Tashtun, Tandzaver and Svarants** communities, **Lori Province in Shnogh, Shamlugh, Odzun, Yeghegnut and Gargar** communities and **Gegharkunik Province in Aygut and Chambarak** communities. All these communities have different problems and different levels of dependency on forest resources and the services it provides.



Figure 3. Forest products offered for sale by local villagers near Tatev Monastery



Figure 4. Local women lashing the wool for bedding in front of the tourists in the yard of Tatev Monastery

Two of the communities, **Halidzor and Tatev**, are located en route to the famous tourist destination, a magnificent Tatev Monastic Complex and connected via the 'Wings of Tatev', world's longest double track aerial tramway. Halidzor and Tatev villages host stations of the aerial tramway on each side leading to the Monastery. Both communities have a great potential for tourism development. However, residents of these

communities do not use this opportunity and are very poor. Tatev monastery is visited by many

tourists, however these villages do not benefit from these visitations and related privileges. "During the high season, only 15 people are employed in the restaurants, several more people receive tourists by renting their rooms for one night, but there is no hotel business as such. Tourists don't stay long with us," said head of Halidzor Village, Marat Gerasimyan during the roadshow meetings in the community. Tourism in Tatev Village is not developed either. They predominantly buy fuelwood for heating and use non-wood forest products, both for their own use and for sale to the tourists. Several other residents sell herbs, rosehip fruits, fruits and berries standing next to



Figure 5. Halidzor village

Tatev Monastery. Some ongoing life can be seen only inside the monastery area. No special programs are available. One can enjoy the magnificent view of the Tatev Monastic Complex from the road above, but the road itself is in a very poor state. Besides, only those who know where to go and how to get there enjoy the walking or hiking experience. When questioned «Why tourism is not developed?» very different answers were received but the main argument was the non-profitability of making investments. Tatev's cable car brings no expected income to villagers and larger investments are needed to develop community-based tourism. The local villagers' only hope for improvements is the upcoming program on establishing the Tatev National Park which has a community development component for support.

If tourism (B&Bs, hotels, cafes, restaurants, souvenir production, etc.) is somehow promoted in these communities, the standard of living will increase and it will reduce the degree of dependence on forests.



Figure 6. Firewood piled in a backyard in Tandzaver v.

In contrast to these communities, **Tandzaver and Svarants** are located far from the main road, up in the mountains and completely isolated. In this regard, they experience difficulties in marketing their agricultural products which compels these communities to be more dependent on forests.

Tandzaver village is all surrounded by forest and is a humid environment even in hot summers. There are no shops and the public transport comes here only

once a week. The village used to have a grocery store, but it closed down because the whole village ran into

debt to the store and it was unable to retrieve the cash it had lent. The nearest residential area is Kapan, but the road is in a very poor shape. The village has only 30 households and over 100 residents. There is a school in the village that had only 9 pupils. “We have 110 residents... Several people work for Goris forestry enterprise, some are employed in the administration department; we practice cattle breeding and beekeeping. We have some of the most environmentally cleanest products, but there is nobody to sell them ... For sure, living here is a heroism,” said Village Head Arsen Harutyunyan in the course of the meeting with the roadshow expert group. It is unclear as to what one can do here in the absence of infrastructures. This place is only fit to deal with the forest which benefits mostly the forestry enterprise in Goris town. The villagers cannot afford fuelwood and assure they use only the deadwood. According to director of Goris forestry enterprise there is plenty of fallen wood to be collected, but it is not being used because younger generation leave the settlements and only the elderly

and lonely people are left. In response to the question whether or not there have been any new forest plantations taking place, he said, “I can say that reforestation is impossible without the tree nursery and it is extremely unpleasant for the forestry officers to fell down the forest. We need tree nurseries which require funding. We have everything that is needed – territory, water, but no funds.”

Svarants community is positioned on the top of a mountain with no infrastructure, no roads and even the mayor office was in ruins. The only profitable business for the members of these communities is logging and the sale of wood.



Figure 7. Beehive in Lichk v.

A somewhat different picture was found in communities of **Lichk and Tashtun**. They are located along the state border, with high poverty rates and high level of migration. These communities are surrounded by a specially protected area and are not entitled to collect 8 m³ of free fallen wood, which other communities receive. They live next to the

forest but have no right to use it, even to collect non-wood forest products. The visiting Roadshow team

found out that almost no schoolchildren are left in these remote communities. There are only 5 pupils studying in school in Lichk and another 3 pupils study in school in the neighboring Tashtun, of which two left the village for holidays and if they do not return, the village will have only one pupil – the son of the village mayor. The reasons behind such mass migration in rural Armenia are well known and recorded: poor social economic conditions, absence of effective



Figure 8. One of the last 3 school kids in Tashtun v.



Figure 9. Roadshow participants in Linchk v.

programs and dramatic decrease in purchasing power, which means reduced access to market, as well as insecurity and vulnerability of local residents to many threats. All these problems acquired a truly disastrous nature in remote villages. They experience a problem in marketing their agricultural produce and request

government support to establish collection points for agricultural products or small production units. The Roadshow team tried to talk to the villagers about the forest, but only a few were interested in forest and nature given such harsh conditions. «The village is dying. Nobody will live here: we are the last inhabitants.... Just have a look what is going on... We have cows, but the milk is collected by the dairy processors at 80 AMD per liter, which is cheaper than water. Who will stay here to live!?» - said the community head. «The gas pipeline runs under our village, but we don't have any gas. We use wood and burn over 10 m³ a year. It is impossible to get more because we are neighboring «Arevik» National Park, which does not entitle us to receive fallen deadwood for free ...» complained the Head of Lichk Village Hovhannes Mirzoyan.



Figure 10. Meeting with community members in Tashtun

Similar problems describe the situation in Tashtun community which hosts only 40 households and has no access to market and most of agricultural products is wasted without being realized. «We have 5 ha of apple orchards, but who eats or buys them? 99% of the harvest gets spoiled and this year we will have the same picture. We drive 400 km and spend the fuel to sell apple fruits somewhere where they are sold at «pennies» – 40 AMD per kilogram. We can't even profit from the sale of dried fruits. ...we have no

gas and use 20 m³ of wood.... We have community forests and are located next to the forests of Arevik National Park (600 ha), but we almost don't use it.»

Shnogh, Shamlugh, Odzun, Yeghegnut and Gargar (Lori Province). Forest communities have traditionally used the forest and it had never led to its destruction or its qualitative changes. Now the forest dependent communities have been given a right to receive 8 m³ of free fallen wood if such is present in the nearby forest, without the legal right to resell the wood. On 19 and 20 of August 2015 in forest communities of Lori - Shnogh, Shamlugh, Odzun, Yeghegnut and Gargar public meetings with local residents and schoolchildren have been held to discuss these most pressing issues. It was maintained by villagers that the forest has substantially decreased and degraded in quality. The human pressure on forest has increased and results in the multiple negative consequences. This has to do with an array of factors like the ever deteriorating socio- economic situation of local communities, low economy and disruption of economic ties, unsanctioned use of forest resources, low levels of activities and reduced income of local population, lack or absence of management and development programs,

the backup and sponsorship of forest crimes by high-level government officials and a number of other challenges, as well insufficient financial resources for local communities.

Shnogh is a big village in the Lori Province of Armenia (North) located near the Teghut copper-molybdenum mine. **Shamlugh** is a town situated on the left bank of Debed River near the Akhtala copper mining factory. These communities are located in a mining region, where environment is being damaged but is not being compensated by the mining companies. The migration level in these communities is very high. Despite the currently operating mining company - the Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine (AODC), population in Shamlugh town has decreased by 4-5 times. To illustrate, if before the collapse of the Soviet Union more than 5000 people used to live in Shamlugh, its population number today is about 1000 people, out of which 100 people are employed by the mining industry working in the Shamlugh copper and molybdenum mine and the Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine (AODC). Some work for the Dilijan forestry enterprise. Despite all houses in Shamlugh are of urban type, they are heated using fuelwood. The most unoccupied cluster of community is women. When asked whether or not the local migration is still going on, the head of the town administration Lendrush Bejanyan replied: «They used to leave in the 1990s. People in the town were involved in mining, engineering, labour work and other. We have rich forest and good living conditions. Then migration began but has stopped by now». According to the head of town administration, the town receives no financial benefit from Akhtala mining plant. “The law on local governance says that 15% of fees from use of natural resources and 20% income must be paid to communities. But we do not get anything. All goes to Yerevan, feeds into budget ...”.

The three communities in Lori Province – **Odzun, Yeghegnut and Gargar** are known as villages where the main problems Armenian farmers are facing are (a) unsubstantiated taxes and loans, (b) absence of agricultural insurance schemes and (c) drastic increase in agricultural products. The roadshow expert team met with the residents of the aforementioned villages and



Figure 11. Roadshow participants in Gargar v. discuss local forestry problems in the premises of village mayor

tried to find out what are the main problems that require urgent solution in order to preserve the remaining forest and simultaneously contribute to the improvement of the living standard of people who use forest and the goods it provides. It has become known that the whole villages went into debt

with several banking loans which they borrowed to improve their situation. This has become the main reason for mass migration from these communities. «We don't know how to get rid of the loans. In the past we had banks, but now we are visited by some strange financial organizations that provide loans furnished by the third-party gyarantees only. Those who cannot pay off their loans simply abandone the village and leave the debt obligation with their guarantors. This process has absorbed the creditor, as well as their relatives, neighbours and friends.... It is a vicious circle for the village with very tight relations and this is why people migrate.»

Clearly the village cannot solve its socio-economic problems on its own. Relevant decisions are needed to provide farmers with loans with normal interest rates and mechanisms to secure agricultural practice and production.



Figure 12. A villager in Aygut carrying fallen wood

Gegharkunik Province is situated at 1500-2000 meters above the sea level. Because of severe climate conditions, people begin preparations for the winter already in summertime and collect fuelwood. Annually an average family spends at least 20 cubic meters of wood. There are big differences between Aygut and Chambarak communities of Gegharkunik Province. **Aygut** is a small village of refugees with the population of about 1000 people. “People don't live here, they survive and barely meet ends,” this is how Aygut



Figure 13. Announcement posted in community: «Investment micro loans, up to 1 mln AMD with a term of 24 months. Intended for people involved in income-generating activity but lacking relevant documentation».

Village Head Mkhitar Karapetyan described the situation in the village. The main source of income for community residents living at the edge of the forest is cattle breeding. Agriculture is not well developed here because the community has no irrigation system.

Drinking water is another crucial problem: the village has no drinking water supply because of old and worn-out aqueducts. 90% of



Figure 14. A typical firewood stove in a village house in Aygut.

the population is unemployed while the cattle breeding is not profitable because of the sharp decrease in the price for natural milk. The village is located in the landslide-prone area and half of the houses have already collapsed, which is another reasons for emigration of local residents. Winter brings new problems to the existing ones – access to firewood is a challenge that local population is struggling to solve each year. As a near-forest village Aygut villagers are entitled to receive annually up to 8 cu. m of free fallen deadwood. Nevertheless, according to the Chief Forestry officer Karen Grigoryan there is no fallen deadwood left in the forest.

Chambarak is the border town, but does not use the privileges given to border communities that are on the list approved by the government, because the government decision does not consider towns as border communities, but only rural settlements (villages). However as a town, it does not have production plants where community members could find employment opportunities, at the same time they have no private agricultural lands. To this end, they



Figure 15. Local schoolchildren in Chambarak meeting Roadshow experts in school.



Figure 16. Chambarak Art School and their wooden craft



suggested that Chambarak be included on the list of border communities and government assists with establishing dairy and meat production plants. Unlike Aygut village, neighboring Chambarak town is not even considered to be a forest dependent community and thus the local residents are not even entitled to get free 8 cu. m of fallen deadwood. Private houses look more like apartments but are heated with firewood and kizyak (dry animal manure). On average a family needs annually 8-10 cu m of firewood.

«People buy firewood at 15,000 AMD per cubic meter, while annually 120,000-130,000 AMD is needed for heating», said Chambarak Mayor Yura Avalyan. In his opinion, making the town business tax-exempt will be a good stimulus for the development of Chambarak as a border town. These two communities are very dependent on forest.

In September 2015, according to the approved schedule the Roadshows have been organized in **Hovq**, **Haghartsin** and **Gosh** communities of **Tavush Province** and in **Jermuk** and **Artavan** communities of **Vayots Dzor Province**.

Tavush Province: Hovq, Haghartsin and Gosh

Hovq is a small mountainous village of refugees. The main occupation of members in this community is agriculture. However, since the village is located far from the main road, villagers experience difficulties marketing their agricultural products. They benefit from the recent government decision which grants 8m³ of free fallen deadwood. In the village with



Figure 17. A house in Hovq v.



Figure 18. Meeting with Hovq villagers in mayor's office

population of 432 people very few deal with agriculture. It used to have irrigation pipeline, but as the Head of Hovq Village Grigor Gevorgyan mentioned it is no longer used because of old and outdated channels, the cultivated land areas are irrigated with drinking water. “People have nothing to live on, they gather berries and sell them or collect wood; forest is the only source of living for us,” said one of the villagers and expressed his concern that forest is retreating year by year.



Figure 19. Haghartsin Monastery in Tavush province

Haghartsin and **Gosh** are communities located on the territory of Dilijan National Park in a recreational area, near the ancient Haghartsin Monastery which is the main tourist destination. **Haghartsin** village hosts a population of 4000 but has neither developed cattle breeding nor any agriculture. Even though Haghartsin Monastery is a well known tourist destination, tourism is not developed here either. The main income for living is the

remittances sent by family members or relatives from Russia, as maintained by local villagers. Nevertheless, villagers got deprived of this income because of a recent



Figure 20. Roadshow in schools of Haghartsin

decrease in the Russian rouble exchange rate. According to a Haghartsin villager, the village is starving as all villagers have taken bank loans which proved to have a high interest rate and had no way to pay back. The main problems identified in these communities are the poorly functioning irrigation system and marketing of the products. The



Figure 21. House in Gosh v. heated with firewood



Figure 22. Fuelwood stocked in a backyard in Gosh v.

community managed pastures are limited and are on degraded lands. This community has no waste disposal site at all and sewage system. To dispose of garbage the villagers either dump it into the Aghstev River or dispose it in the forest located above the village, or simply bury it in their house yards. **Gosh** has a population of 1200 people. Poverty, unemployment and emigration are the main problems in this village. Installation of gas pipelines connecting gas supplies to communities have been launched this year in the village, however it was maintained by the village mayor and the villagers that nobody is going to heat their houses with mains gas because it is not affordable. Residents of these two communities do not benefit from the free provision of 8 m³ fallen deadwood, and have no access to the forest non-wood products. However, there is a very high rate of illegal logging in this reserve. In fact, Tavush province is divided into two parts where one part is entitled to collect 8 cu. m of free fallen deadwood and the other part cannot.

Vayots Dzor Province: Jermuk and Artavan. In Vayots Dzor Province we have visited town **Jermuk** also a well renowned health resource, where the main occupation of residents is provision of touristic services and which has mostly a seasonal character. They are not engaged in agriculture or industry. This town is less dependent on forest because they do not use fuelwood to heat apartments. Only Kechut district located within the administrative area of Jermuk community used



Figure 23. Jermuk health resort

firewood. The community residents gather only medical herbs and berries for sale. The roadshow participants suggested that Jermuk Forest must be returned its status of Jermuk Forestry Enterprise taking into account its importance. They also suggested to establish a tree nursery to grow pine tree



Figure 24. The Roadshow team arriving in Artavan

species in Jermuk. The specifics of Jermuk forest are such that it grows at a very high altitude - 2080 meters above sea level and it is important to increase the amount of oxygen for the town, because as it is maintained by the participants of the meeting the residents suffer from the lack of oxygen. The **Artavan** community located far from the main road is another border community which is not included on the list of border communities benefiting from tax

subsidies. It has no collection or production points for agricultural products. Because of construction of four small hydropower stations on their river, this community lost its water supply which was used for irrigation of their croplands. Members of this community have complained that the head of the forestry branch and the regional authority representative announced that free supplies of 8 m³ deadwood will be given only to the most disadvantaged families and requested FLEG's help to intervene and regulate this problem. After hearing all this, the Roadshow team leader, Nazeli Vardanyan decided to phone the FLEG II Focal Point in Armenia and Director of Hayantar SNCO directly to inquire about the provisions released regarding the 8m³ firewood in Artavan community. It turned out that Hayantar had never given the instruction to interrupt the wood provision. After a quick investigation, it emerged that this decision was taken by the staff of the Regional Governor Office and the Head of the local forestry branch in Artavan. A half an hour later the Head of the local forestry branch arrived and promised to deliver the required amount of fuelwood to the households and the problem have been solved immediately.



Figure 25. Inhabitants of Artavan discussing their needs and concerns in the town hall

Similar problems concerning the implementation of the decree on free provision of 8 m³ of fallen wood were found in other villages visited during the roadshow, but this was not the only issue encountered. Life in remote forest-dependent communities can be extremely challenging. The harsh conditions originating from critical social, economic, demographic, and environmental factors are often further worsened by inefficient administration, and forest management plays a crucial role.

In all 20 forest dependent communities visited during the FLEG II Roadshows there have been very interesting and effective discussions around a broad spectrum of issues related to forest protection and governance, social, economic and other problems. These discussions have attracted the attention of a wide local citizenry from residents of local communities (especially women, youth and schoolchildren) to representatives of government agencies, local forest institution, NGOs. These discussions helped not only the rural communities but also the Roadshow expert team who consulted them to understand the social, economic and environmental hardships they are facing in order to identify and propose the appropriate changes to the existing forest and environmental legislation that governs the rural life of forest communities. Participants of the roadshow meetings have been interviewed, their ideas and concerns have been recorded and taken for further analysis.

4.3 Media coverage of FLEG II Roadshows in Armenia

Based on interviews and discussions in the communities, the Roadshow expert team started a series of short roadshow stories about each community and giving an account of encountered problems in communities. The stories appeared under title “Stories from the Forest” and were published as they have been visited on the Ecolur’s environmental information portal www.ecolur.org.

In October 2015, the support staff summarized the results of the Roadshows and community discussions, analyzed issues identified in each forest-dependent community. All suggestions, ideas, proposals and recommendations which were collected from participants of the FLEG II Roadshows have been analyzed and evaluated by the project experts. As a result of the roadshow visits, the experts drafted suggestions for development of forest legislation focused on the improvement of social conditions of life in forest-dependent communities and reduction of pressure on the forest with an elaborate economic analysis. These suggestions have been preliminary discussed with «Hayantar» SNCO and other relevant organizations and have been submitted to the Government of RA.

The Project culminated in a press conference given in the premises of «Ecolur» information agency where the results of the FLEG II Roadshows have been officially introduced touching on the institutional, managerial and social problems of the forest sector. Also, the press-conference highlighted some of the most important proposals received from community members and discussed possible solutions that can legally improve the situation in the forest dependent communities. The full



Figure 26. Press conference in Yerevan featuring the results of the FLEG II Roadshows in Armenia

coverage of the press conference is available here: <http://www.ecolur.org/en/news/forest/what-is-left-from-armenian-forests/7686/> and were additionally broadcast on «Lyusne» Radio: <http://lyunse.com/?p=17702> The Roadshow team leader Nazeil Vardanyan has participated in two TV talk shows with a strong focus on the issues of forest protection, management and improvement of forest legislation: «Free Zone» TV program broadcast by the first Armenian National TV Channel «H1» and «Azdarar» program on «AR» TV channel as well as the National Radio (<http://www.armradio.am/hy/2015/09/30/%D5%A2%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%BA%D5%A1%D5%B>

0%D5%BA%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80-
%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%BC%D5%A1%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%BF%D5%B8%D6
%82%D5%B4%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A8-%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%A1/).

Additional two stories have been published on the ENPI II FLEG Program website, where one of the articles gave a detailed account of a story that took place in Artavan community during the community roadshows (<http://www.enpi-fleg.org/news/direct-from-villages-to-top-level-officials/>) and (<http://www.enpi-fleg.org/news/2015-fleg-roadshow-the-hotline-between-yerevan-and-your-village/>)

By the end of the Roadshow campaign in Armenia we can readily state that the awareness raising among local forest communities, their active involvement in public discussions, understanding their right for access to information and their special role in managing and conserving natural resources, especially in the forest protection have been accomplished. Their voice has been successfully raised through a very effective dialogue between the local government, community members, local authorities and other non-state stakeholders.

5. Results of the Project

Over the course of four and a half months, FLEG II Roadshows have been organized in 20 forest-dependent communities in five forested provinces of Armenia: Tavush (Azatamut, Aknaghbyur, Hovq, Haghartsin, Gosh), Syunik (Halidzor, Tatev, Lichk, Tashtun, Tandzaver, Svarants), Lori (Shnogh, Shamlugh, Odzun, Yeghegnut, Gargar), Vayots Dzor (town Jermuk and Artavan) and Gegharkunik (Aygut and Chambarak).

In particular the Roadshow expert team:

- Prepared and disseminated materials based on which the participants of the public discussions could have an idea about the roles and responsibilities the communities and forest administration should have, measures to fight forest crimes and corruption in the forest sector, mechanisms for protecting forests and other natural resources, and proposed improvements to find contradictions in different laws and bylaws and suggest how to improve current situation;
- Organized discussions in each forest community, covering a wide range of socio-economic, legal, environmental and institutional issues related to forests and the forest use
- Organized branding of the FLEG II Roadshow vehicle carrying experts in order to ensure visibility of the Roadshow campaign in forest communities
- Organized two public talks in Yerevan with a wide media coverage: one high-level round table in the beginning of the campaign and one press-conference in the end of the project
- Recorded and prepared the proceedings of local discussions, presenting the main findings and recommendations made by participants in the discussions;
- Analyzed and prepared a package of findings and proposals made by local communities and discussed them with "Hayantar" SNCO and other relevant stakeholders for further lobbying in the Government of Armenia.

All these communities are different, but they have very common characteristics, such as low living standards, high level of dependence on forests, passive behavior and attitude of people, loss of confidence, lack of knowledge about their rights, consumer attitude towards the forest. Under these conditions it is very important to change the mentality of the people and their attitude to environment. Roadshows helped accomplish this task. A special significance of this campaign is that it made possible to gather all social groups of communities - students, youth, women, farmers, representatives of local authorities, employees of state agencies and the forestry sector. As a result, the Roadshows helped to raise the sense of community ownership on forests not only as timber resource but as a wealth of their

natural resources, understand the importance to save this wealth for their very survival. Roadshows raised a wide spectrum of issues with forest communities and discussed the environmental issues and challenges they are facing, their consequences and the ways to solve them, their environmental rights and the need to actively participate in environmental decision-making, especially at local community level.

Finally, the campaign produced the main output of this initiative: a summarized and analyzed package of proposals collected from communities, which was preliminary discussed with «Hayantar» SNCO and will be lobbied in the Government of Armenia, to finally make the voice of rural forest communities heard.

6. Conclusion

- Engaging communities in decision making process whatsoever has to be very participatory. Only by becoming part of this project it is possible to raise their sense of responsibility and ownership over forests they depend on. Interactive and multi-stakeholders discussions in forest-dependent communities on the one hand gave an opportunity to listen to people's voice, understand their problems and jointly find solutions through an honest and open discussion, from the other hand it allowed to raise their awareness, increase their civic activity and willingness to participate in decision-making process and become responsible for their future generations. It is extremely important to continue support direct, more face-to-face meetings with local communities and maintain the trust that has been built on the project.
- From a different angle, the added value of this campaign was not only about raising the awareness and local voice of local population, but the opportunity given during roadshow events to «consult» rural communities and learn the situation firsthand in order to identify the current needs, and be able to provide realistic and well grounded solutions to problems they are facing in their day-to-day struggle for life. It was an intensive information exchange with a neverending mutual learning. There was much to share and a lot more to learn.
- It is always to the common and mutual benefit to work together with the government when it gets to the point of seeking and providing serious real-life solutions to problems in communities. During the Roadshow campaign there was a good cooperation with «Hayantar» SNCO which has been very helpful and provided relevant contacts of local forest enterprises and other government officials and more importantly promptly solved and satisfied the on-site problems and demands raised by community members.
- There were some challenges encountered as well. In some forest communities it was not very to involve a bigger number of community members. The heads of local governments usually invited people who support them rather than those community members who would argue or dispute them, confronting their points of view. Thus the Roadshow expert team also interviewed people in the streets and in their private houses.
- The fact that forests received a substantial media coverage during the project was largely due to engagement of local communities and their most sincere and impartial stories. Villagers and

local communities are the best source of what is happening in the forests and adjacent territories.

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About the Program

The ENPI East Countries FLEG II Program — Complementary Measures for Georgia and Armenia is being implemented by the World Bank in partnership with WWF and IUCN. It complements the EU-funded FLEG II Program. The objectives of the Program are to support Georgia and Armenia in strengthening forest governance through improving implementation of relevant international processes, enhancing their forest policy, legislation and institutional arrangements, and developing, testing and evaluating sustainable forest management models at the local level on a pilot basis for future replication. The three specific Program objectives are: Implementation of the 2005 St. Petersburg FLEG Ministerial Declaration and ensuring continuation of the process launched in 2005 (regional level); Formulation and implementation of sustainable forest sector policies, including legal and administrative reforms for sustainable forest management and protection (national level); and demonstration of best sustainable forest management practices in targeted areas for further replication (sub-national level). The overall objective of the complementary EU-funded Program is to promote sustainable forest governance, management, and protection of forests in the participating Program countries, ensuring the contribution of the region's forests to climate change adaptation and mitigation, to ecosystems and biodiversity protection, and to sustainable livelihoods and income sources for local populations and national economies.

Project Partner



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WWF

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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