



Shadow Report on the Implementation of SDG 15.2 in Armenia from a Women's Perspective

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Forest landscape in Armenia. Ecolur NGO

Executive Summary

For decades, forests in Armenia have been cut down at a devastatingly fast rate. The number of forest fires has increased in recent years. In 2002, fires were noted on 5.6 ha of forestland, whereas in 2010, and 2011, fires were observed on 810.6 and 472.4 ha of forestland, respectively. [1] In 2017, the figure was 3000 ha. [2] Increasing numbers of fires are conditional upon factors of climate change as well as the practice of burning meadows and pastures in the autumn.

In addition, illegal logging is still an issue as firewood remains an

important source of energy. Communities are mostly poor, and gas and electricity costs are high. All of these patterns undercut resources that sustain environmental health and human wellbeing.

Women can be among the first and most affected. Their limited involvement in the work force reduces their capacity to adapt to losses or make decisions for the benefit of themselves and the environment. Despite these constraints women play a critical role as stewards of the land and make up much of the agricultural

labour force in Armenia. They may be the primary collectors of resources such as wood for fuel, as well as wild foods and herbs for medicines. However, they are often excluded from decisions about sustainable ecosystems. This is a loss in terms of the prospects for sustainable ecosystems, which also depend on gender equality in other areas such as access to land, livelihoods, natural resources, and a say in how they are shared. As essential players in the country women need to be included in decision-making on ecosystem use at all levels.

Introduction

In 1990, the forest coverage of Armenia was 11.2%. However, since 1990 no inventory of forest cover has taken place and there is no consensus on the actual level of forest cover left in Armenia. According to certain estimates, [3] the forest coverage is only 6-8%. In addition, Armenian forests are not considered to be commercial forests, they are protected and logging is forbidden by law. The law states that up to 35,000 m³ per year of forest can be cleared, but only for sanitary purposes.

But, instead of keeping to these limits, up to 700,000 m³ of forest are cleared through illegal logging every year. In Armenia there are no forest plantations, the forests are considered the property of the state.

On average, a family in rural communities uses 10-15 m³ of firewood per heating season, the poverty rate is very high and gas and electricity are expensive. One of the factors affecting poverty levels in women's lack of participation in the labour market.

Despite economic progress over the last decade disparities between women and men remain salient in Armenia, especially in dimensions that are powerfully influenced by social norms. In domains like education and health gender equality the outcomes in Armenia are broadly comparable with those of Europe and Central Asia and better than those of lower-middle-income countries globally. [4]

However, barriers to women's access to economic opportunities persist and gender inequalities are manifest in demographic imbalances, and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Social norms and patriarchy continue to place barriers to economic participation by women, causing both misallocation and insufficient utilisation of women's human capital.

According to the World Bank "Armenia Country Gender Assessment" of 2016 [5] if working-age women who are not participating in the labour market were to do so at the same rates as their men counterparts there would be a 14.3% increase in Armenia's GDP per capita. About 40% of this loss in GDP per capita derives from distortions in the choice of occupations by women relative to men; the remaining 60 percent corresponds to the costs associated with gaps in labour force participation.

Brief Assessment and some key statistics

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

The 2010 Human Development Report introduced the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which reflects gender-based inequalities in three areas – reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Estimated data averages for the period from 2010-2015 are as follows: The Armenian GII value was 0.293 in 2015 ranking it 61 out of 159 countries. The mortality ratio is 25%, the birth rate amongst adolescents is 23.0%, women's share of seats in parliament is 10.7%, Population with at least some secondary education, female: 98.5%, male: 98.1%, labour force participation rates, female: 54.9%, male: 73.6% (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>).

According to Statistics Agency of the Republic of Armenia for 2016-2017, the statistics for women's

employment as compared to men's is as follows: for 2016 the ratio between economically active males and females was 68.1 for males and 51.7 for females. In 2016 and 2017, the ratio is 68.5 (male) to 50.7 (female). The employment rate of males is higher. Thus in 2016 it is 54.9 (male) and 42.9 (female), and in 2017 53.9 (male) and 42.4 (female) (these are official Armenian statistics from the RA Armenian Statistics Agency, the link is available only in Armenian http://armstat.am/file/article/sv_02_18a_141.pdf). The Palma ratio for Armenia in 2015 was 1.2, the inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) was 0.674, inequality in income was 13.9, inequality-adjusted income index is 0.573, overall loss in HDI due to inequality is 9.3% (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ARM#>).

SDG 15.2: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

According to the rates as reported in the FAO Forest Resources Assessment 2015, the forested area in Armenia covered 332,000 ha, the annual rate of change was 0.1%. In 2010 the reforestation rate was 6.800 ha a year.

The entire national budget for the environmental sector is estimated at 825.1 million Armenian Dram. In comparison, the military budget for Jan-Feb 2018 is 21 billion Armenian Drams /in Jan-Feb. 2018/. [6]

Analysis on progress and challenges regarding SDG 15.2, including analysis of the participation levels of IPOs, LCs and Women's groups in national SDG 15 policies

According to the World Bank 2016 assessment of gender equality in Armenia the barriers to gender equality in Armenia are manifest in the occupational segregation of women, a gendered concentration in particular fields of study in tertiary education, lack of female labour force participation during the childbearing years, and underrepresentation of women among political leaders and entrepreneurs.

Although a larger share of young women relative to young men are

enrolled in tertiary education, women and men specialize in different subjects and fields of study (the social sciences, education, and health care among women and technical fields among men).

As good practice, it should be highlighted that in social sectors, in non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations, women show better involvement. They are active representatives in civil society. Women are involved in environmental projects implemented by NGOs. However,

there are fewer women leaders in the private sector, including in managerial and entrepreneurial positions.

Only 58% of women aged 15–64 participate in the labour market in Armenia. This is slightly higher than the European and Central Asian average, but 17 percentage points lower than men in Armenia. The gender difference in participation is greatest in the 25–34 age group (World Bank assessment of gender equality in Armenia, 2016).

A number of targets contained under SDG 15 relate to other SDGs.



For example, Target 15.9 refers to poverty reduction strategies and is therefore relevant to SDG 1. Poverty reduction is also related to the empowerment of women, mitigation of inequality, increasing the education level among women and higher rates of employment for women.

Large-scale deforestation in the last two decades has brought about crucial negative qualitative modifications. A study on rural communities' dependence on forest land in Armenia carried out during the years of 2015-2016 showed that the nationwide dependence on forest land was 4% with variations in different regions. Firewood remains an important source of energy because despite gas being available to most communities it remains out of the reach of rural households due to the high price of gas and the high cost of installation. [7]

On average 61% of firewood used by households is collected by family members and 33% of that firewood is purchased from other community members (middlemen) for whom selling firewood is an occupation. Other than firewood, the remaining most important forest products include berries, wild fruits and other foraged food, which provide an important part of rural families' cash income.

Women, particularly those who are poor and living in rural areas, often depend on forests for fuel, fodder and food. According to a UN Women analysis when women make up a critical mass of between 25% and 35% of the people involved in community forestry, their impact is felt. Forest conditions and regeneration improve, and the women themselves gain greater political voice. [8]

The reasons for gender inequality in Armenia can be summed up as three main challenges:

(i) insufficient participation of women in the workforce; (ii) concentration of women in certain fields of study and in certain sectors of employment; and (iii) social perceptions on the value of women and daughters reflected in parental preference for sons.

The reasons for the decline of forest products are overharvesting, illegal logging, and climate change, as most Armenian communities claim. Weak state restoration and sanitation activities and communities' alienation from any decision-making and monitoring processes all negatively impact the implementation of SDG 15.2. Drivers of deforestation are agriculture (grazing, using forestland for agricultural purposes), logging for firewood, mining, and construction. Indirect drivers include poverty, weak forest sector governance and institutions, lack of cross-sector coordination, and illegal activities related to weak enforcement.



Forest degradation due to open mining. Ecolur NGO

Linking this analysis with the key views and priorities of local communities and women in the field of forests and women's empowerment

As mentioned above illegal logging is one of the reasons for deforestation. One of the main reasons for illegal logging is to provide firewood for those with no access to alternative forms of energy such as gas and electricity, either because they are not available or are unaffordable. In energy-poor areas women must spend time and effort to find fuel. Projects to extend sustainable energy options in rural and mountainous regions of Armenia should be encouraged because they will free up the time women spend on cutting wood or preparing cow dung. As mentioned in the Asian Development Bank of Armenia "Country Gender Assessment" 2015, one result of projects to extend the supply of natural gas to remote rural regions was that now "women have more time to spend with their children or to invest in productive activities". It is commonly assumed that alternative energy projects will ease women's household workload and that women may benefit from their extra free time and use it to become involved in the social political and other spheres of society.

According to surveys conducted of women in Armenia they are interested in using renewable sources of energy, but at present, they do not have sufficient social or financial capital to initiate such changes. There may also be greater potential to engage with women about their priorities in the energy sector through supporting their participation in renewable energy projects rather than in conventional infrastructure rehabilitation projects (ASD "Country Gender Assessment" 2015 report). Not only should women's interest in renewable energy be supported, but they should also have access to potential jobs in this new field. If women are early adopters of new technologies, they should also benefit from new jobs.



Recommendations

It is recommended to:

Invest in campaigns promoting: the value of girls, increased gender equality in leadership roles and increased confidence in girls.

Support women's work participation in work, especially participation in entrepreneurship, politics and community decision making bodies,

Media campaigns to be targeted towards the workplace to address gender biases and to promote the value of women and daughters as leaders,

Ensure that education and skills acquisition for both men and women lead them to jobs in sectors that are projected to grow and provide better pay,

Increase involvement of communities in decision making about environmental issues, in particular with the focus on women's involvement,

Strengthen monitoring mechanisms over forest protection, in particular for the purpose of prevention of illegal logging. Women should also be empowered to become involved in monitoring activities,

Develop sustainable renewable energy projects, and create potential jobs in this field, where women can be involved.



Community forest planting project. **Ecolur** NGO

[1] Rio+, National Assessment Report 2012

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/800Armenia_Report_Final.pdf

[2] State Forest Monitoring Center (SNCO) of the RA Ministry of Agriculture, Armenia

[3] "European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument East Countries Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Program" Anahit Mkrtchyan, Forest Dependency in Rural Armenia, 2016

[3] World Bank Report, "Armenia Country Gender Assessment" 2016

[4] World Bank Report, "Armenia Country Gender Assessment" 2016

[5] http://armstat.am/file/article/sv_02_18a_211.pdf

[6] "European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument East Countries Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Program" Anahit Mkrtchyan, Forest Dependency in Rural Armenia, 2016, page 39

[7] <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-15-life-on-land>



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