

## Commercial Logging 2: The Role of Logging Companies

Background

*Though the International Timber Trade Organisation (ITTO) has tried to stem low impact logging and institute sustainable use starting 2000, no effect is yet visible. The global commerce of tropical timber yields more than 7.5 billion US\$ per year.*

The economy of this product has grown enormously since the '90s: There was a logging increase of 38% in Gabon in 1992-97, and 50% in Cameroon. Today most of the Central and West African forests are under concession of about 130 European logging companies, taking 4,5 mio m<sup>3</sup> timber in 1990 alone.



*A logging camp in what had been pristine forest.*

BRAND ARCHIVE

In the middle '90s, African countries had 6% of the world market in tropical timber, while 60% came from the Indo-Pacific. The Asian rainforests are almost completely logged out, while the **demand for timber** in East Asia grows. This led to Asian logging companies increasingly seeking timber concessions in South America and Africa. It is well-known that those companies pursue a policy of **unrestricted exploitation**.

The logging in Asia has disturbed two-thirds of the entire forest area to collect just a few types of lucrative trees. To transport the tree trunks out of the forests, **roads up to 70 meters wide** have been cut through the forests. Nature conservationists fear that Asian firms will jump in, if European companies retreat from their African concessions.

The profit for African tropical countries from logging companies is **questionable**. They sell limited concessions for logging and legislate logging quotas, but it is mostly raw material which gets exported. Investment in manufacturing in-country would secure a better future for Africa.

### Effects of commercial logging

- building of approach roads, bridges and forest aisles
  - inaccessible areas are opened
  - shrinking of habitats by separating them in patches
- transportation
  - taking hunters into the areas and bringing out bushmeat to the urban markets
- subsequent stream of non-local personnel and others
  - new housing developments along the roads
  - food resources taken from the local area, also commercial trade of bushmeat
- logging camps (hundreds/thousands of camp dwellers)
  - increased buying power of the workers
  - material and machinery for production of wire snares and guns, availability of ammunition

In the PR Congo, hunting in areas with logging roads is 3-6 times higher than in unlogged areas.

The logging companies are now under pressure from wildlife conservationists and external funding agencies, such as the World Bank. There is the question of responsibility, but **the rights of national government and local communities, and of the management of the companies, are frequently unclear**.

Some logging companies provide food for their workers or support environmental education. With this they show at least **recognition of their responsibility** in the bushmeat trade. But in one concession in Cameroon the workers went on strike when it was prohibited to transport bushmeat on company lorries.



*Bridges allow motorised traffic to formerly pristine areas.*

BRAND ARCHIVE



K. Armann / WSPA



*Logging lorries are also bushmeat taxis.*

K. Armann / WSPA

### Selective logging (1-3 trees per hectare)

Formerly praised, the way it is nowadays practised is **not always ecologically sound**. This is a result of different interpretations of the term "sustainability", and a lack of knowledge of forest dynamics and the animals affected. **A lot of areas are destroyed just by dragging single trees out of the woods with massive bulldozers.**

In Gabon, "only" 10% of the tree canopy cover has been lost through selective logging. Scientists, however, have concluded the **chimpanzee population decrease** from 50,000 to 30,000 individuals is due to habitat fragmentation through selective logging. This fragmentation has a strong impact on the social system of the apes. And it also **directly decreases the populations of endangered monkeys such as Red Colobus and Diana monkeys.**