
Cameroon: who conserves and who destroys forests?

The use of Cameroon's forests is oriented to the logic of private accumulation and economic interests, regardless of the interests of the Pygmy population that depends on those forests for their survival. Forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate, due to the high prices of some types of wood in the international market, to the weight of the country's external debt and to the collusion of government officials and international forestry companies.

The government and corporations view forests as wood to be sold for large sums of money. The Pygmy population see forests in a totally different manner. As a Bakola woman says:

"... we are in the midst of huge desolation, we no longer recognise the forest, we no longer understand what is happening. Our forests change from one day to the next. What future awaits our children? The settlements destroy the forest, and the felling of trees prevents us from gathering honey to feed our children. The noise of their huge machines is causing the animals to flee far away. The trees falling into the rivers muddy the river beds. Some fruits are becoming scarce and we have to walk for a long time to find them. And the mushrooms we used to gather everywhere are gone. ... our children have no future. Where will they find animals to hunt? The bark, the leaves and the fruits for curing and eating?"

Honey, meat, fish, water, fruit, mushrooms, medicine, firewood, wood: all this and much more is how these indigenous peoples view their forest. Wood for industry is the only product which the government and corporations see in the forest. The former viewpoint ensures forest conservation, while the latter is leading to forest destruction.

Source: Tabapssi F. Tomothee.- The Bakola Pygmies: subjected to integration and industrial forestry exploitation, Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) 4, Oct-Nov-Dec 1996