
[Congo, Democratic Republic: Pygmies stand up to World Bank logging development](#)

Together with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Bank is supporting the development of comprehensive new forestry laws in the Congo, as well as the 'zoning' of the country's entire forest area which would imply the logging of some 60 million hectares of tropical forest. More than 100 environment, development and human rights groups had challenged in February of this year those projects (see WRM Bulletin N° 80).

This process has been debated for some time. In February and March 2003 we had already published evidence disseminated by activist Karl Ammann, who disclosed how an Aide Memoire of the World Bank was actually the World Bank's advise on how to reactivate the forestry sector (see WRM Bulletins N° 67 and 68) in order for the DRC to become the first timber producer in Africa. The World Bank has been thus laying the grounds for the development of industrial logging in the country.

However, this wouldn't go without impacts. According to the Bank's own estimates, as many as 35 million of the Congo's 50 million people depend on the forests for their very survival. All those people could see their livelihood undermined at the best, or even destroyed.

On last July 8, one of the potentially most affected groups --the 'Pygmy' peoples-- put their case directly to World Bank President James Wolfensohn requesting him to halt plans that could unleash a wave of destruction on the rainforests where they live. This action took place during a video conference organised by the Rainforest Foundation UK, which is also challenging the Bank's plans for a massive increase in industrial logging in the Congo.

This wouldn't be the first case for the World Bank disrupting the life of 'Pygmies': in Cameroon, the Bagyeli --one of the many different 'Pygmy' peoples-- are threatened by a World Bank-sponsored oil pipeline which is to be built through their land. The 'Pygmy' are forest dwellers, and know the forest, its plants and its animals intimately. They live by hunting animals such as antelopes, pigs and monkeys, fishing, and gathering honey, wild yams, berries and other plants. They are seeing their rainforest homes threatened by logging, and are being driven out by settlers. In some places they have been evicted and their land has been designated as national parks.

"You must not forget that the lives of indigenous peoples depend on the forest," Adolphine Muley of the Congolese Union of Indigenous Women (UEFA) told the World Bank President. "For a 'Pygmy' to talk of forest exploitation is to talk of reinforcing misery and poverty. You must put strategies in place so that the 'Pygmy' peoples are not damaged by the system that you are developing."

Article based on information from: "Congo 'Pygmies' meet with World Bank President", Press Release of the Rainforest Foundation, 8 July 2004, <http://www.rainforestfoundation.org.uk> , sent by Simon Counsell, E-mail: SimonC@rainforestuk.com ; "Tribes & People Groups. Pygmies", The Africa Guide, <http://www.africaguide.com/culture/tribes/pygmies.htm>

