
Samoa: Workshop on the Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation

A National Workshop on the Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Samoa was held on 17 - 21 December, 2002, in the Village of Aopo, Island of Savaii, organised by Ole Siosiomaga Society Inc. (OLSSI) and hosted by the Global Forest Coalition.

The villages who participated in the Aopo workshop acknowledged the importance of the workshop which enabled them to fully understand the real meaning of agreeing with business ventures to harvest their invaluable native rainforests. They realised how very little they are getting for their trees when compared with what the loggers are getting in return for the harvest. Thanks to the workshop, they are now in a much better position to negotiate and to decide on ways that will best give them the real benefits of their forests by conservation measures.

Poverty, weak and outdated legislative framework, weak monitoring systems, privatisation by government of public goods such as native rainforests, paradigm shift in the values leading to unsustainable consumption and production patterns that put priority on quick cash from harvesting forests as opposed to the long term value of the forest resources, were some of the causes detected in the workshop.

Also government large scale developments which target forest areas previously reserved for their rich biodiversity imply roads bulldozed in the forest areas providing easy and ready access by loggers to harvest the forests. A good example of this is the new town of Salelologa in the Island of Savaii where government has taken over a large area of close to 3000 acres of virgin forest. Bulldozing of roads have already started and this development went ahead without any environmental impact assessment (EIA).

Banks as well as bilateral and multilateral organisations constitute an indirect cause of deforestation and forest degradation when they fail to apply the same standards they subscribe to in their own countries when operating in a recipient country. On issues of EIA, prior consultation with communities and resource owners are often handled in such a way that business and profit oriented concepts are imposed on communities in developing countries.

Trade-related pressure to contribute to the gross national product and to foreign exchange was also detected as an underlying cause of deforestation and forest degradation. Globalisation impacts in Samoa were considered another form of colonial domination. This has caused the government to devolve its service responsibilities to outside corporations and external interest of foreign direct investments not interested in the true spirit of partnership in development, but who use the opportunity to gain huge profits from the exploitation of the country's natural resources such as forests. Meanwhile, industrialized countries will use the provision provided in the climate change convention under the clean development mechanism to continue greenhouse gas emissions in return to reforestation through large scale monoculture tree plantations.

For OLSSI, this was a success story in its concern in the ongoing exploitation of the forests in Samoa

and the high rate of depletion of this invaluable resource for the future generations. Without the villagers being fully aware of the true value of their natural resources, and the real impact of the contracts signed between them as forest owners and business operators, very little can be done to counter these concerns.

Article based on excerpts from "National Workshop on the Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Samoa", by Fiu Mataese Elisara, Ole Siosiomaga Society, Samoa. E-mail: ngo_siosiomaga@samoa.ws . The full report is available at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Samoa/UC.html>