
Logging the rainforest: A recipe for local and global disaster

Industrial logging is the main cause of forest loss throughout the tropics. It is the starting point of a process leading to the forests' final destruction and substitution by agricultural crops, cattle raising or monoculture tree plantations. These are well known facts supported by more than sufficient evidence.

Even more importantly, industrial logging destroys the livelihoods of forest and forest-dependent peoples who, deprived of the resources they depend on, become poor. Contrary to the official discourse, logging does not lead to development; it results in impoverishment and social disintegration. Women are disproportionately affected by logging activities, which provide them with no employment opportunities while depleting the resources they traditionally use and manage.

In tropical countries, the process begins with the violation of the territorial rights of indigenous peoples and other traditional communities, who are the righteous owners of the forest. As most people confronted with such situation would, they frequently resist the entry of logging companies to their territories, which in turn usually results in state repression to protect the companies' legal "rights".

Forest destruction, human rights abuses, poverty creation is the local part of the equation. On the other side there is wealth creation for transnationals and local elites and an abundant supply of cheap --though very valuable-- raw material to provide rich consumers with elegant toilet seats, sumptuous coffins and other equally "important" symbols of wealth.

Some actors are crucial to make logging and end-consumers meet, among which the World Bank, the Inter American, African and Asian Development Banks and the International Monetary Fund. The banks provide the necessary funding for the road infrastructure needed to access the forest, while the IMF --as well as the banks-- force tropical countries into increasing natural resources' exports in order to ensure external debt payments. Being forests one of the main resources available, they are at the front line of exports and are later substituted by other export oriented crops grown in place of the forest. Another very powerful player has now been added to ensure that transnational corporations make wood flow to the consumer markets: the World Trade Organization.

The whole process leading to forest destruction is clearly at odds with the international community's commitments to protect biodiversity and to counter climate change and desertification, agreed upon in three legally-binding conventions. At the same time, it also violates human rights commitments, including the protection of indigenous peoples' rights, and the commitments agreed upon at the 1995 Social Summit and the 1995 Conference on Women. The list of environmental and social instruments being violated by industrial logging --and its national and international backers-- is indeed very long, only shorter than the list of the actual violations themselves.

The global market's demand for wood cannot continue being used as an excuse to justify forest destruction. Consumption of wood --and other raw materials produced in forest lands-- needs to be drastically reduced to a level that ensures social justice and environmental conservation. Wood is necessary, but the need to respect local peoples' rights and to protect the local and global

environment is far more necessary. Industrial logging in the rainforest is a recipe for local and global disaster and must be made to stop.