
Tanzania: where illegal logging is almost legal

Tanzania's 33.5 million hectares (129,310 square miles) of forests are increasingly at risk, mostly as a result of illegal logging, which is destroying some 500,000 hectares (19,300 square miles) of the country's pristine forests every year.

Government officials admit that illegal exploitation is occurring almost all over the country, both in Forest Reserves and in unreserved forest areas. Illegal trading in timber products acquired illegally is especially rife in cross border areas. An example is the illegal trading in *Brachylaena Hutchinsii* (Muhuhu) on the Tanzanian-Kenyan border, in which most of the timber is both illegally harvested and exported.

Not only does the government seem unable to address the problem, but its own forestry staff has been accused of being directly involved in the illegal timber trade. The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, Philemon Luhanjo, has admitted that some forestry staff are guilty of engaging in illegal timber trade. He says other suspects in the illegal timber business are timber product dealers, private individuals, sawmillers and logging companies.

Within such context of illegality, working conditions of logging employees are so bad, that their subsistence depends on bushmeat, which is resulting in the decimation of wildlife populations, including internationally red-listed species.

Among other measures, such as stricter police controls along the main roads, the government is now trying to engage local communities living near the forests to assist in the implementation of adequate long-term management of forests. However, unless the underlying causes of illegal logging are clearly identified and addressed, forests will continue disappearing.

Source: Nicodemus Odhiambo, ENS, 26/8/99, sent by Rain Forest Relief