
Papua New Guinea: something need to change ... fast!

Papua New Guinea -home of one of the world's largest remaining contiguous rainforests- is being subject to a destructive deforestation process. In an attempt to increase the country's exports to face a severe economic crisis, the government has adopted a policy of opening the country to foreign logging companies -granting them concessions and turning a blind eye to illegal logging- that threaten to deplete its forests.

Malaysian companies, also responsible for having raped their own country's forests, are practising commercial clearfelling at its worst in Papua New Guinea. On average, for every one to two hundred year-old tree felled, another 16 are damaged or destroyed. Wood is used to feed pulpmills and to build furniture for the Asian market. Cleared land is then ready to be used for oil palm monoculture plantations, a cash crop that is expanding all along the country, and generating further negative social and environmental problems.

As usual, these top-down centralised "development" decisions are impacting on local peoples. The Kosuwa indigenous people -one of the last hunter gatherers in the world- have denounced that their customary land, forests and waters are being depleted by logging companies. Under the false promise of bringing money, new houses and roads, what this "development" has really brought is the loss of the Kosuwa's environment and livelihoods. Even jobs in logging operations are poorly paid, temporary and usually occupied by outsiders. For each cubic metre of the precious timber extracted from their land exporters earn about U\$S 75, while native landowners are paid less than U\$S 4. A massive logging-extension of 800,000 hectares has been recently granted to a giant Malaysian company within the Kamula people's territory. The same as the Kosuwa, they are preparing to resist the invaders. In this case, even the national Forest Authority strongly recommended against this logging extension. However, the government chose to ignore the advice.

If things don't change, the commercial logging industry will exhaust Papua New Guinea's forests in just 15 years. In the process, some foreign logging companies will make huge profits, some few locals will end up rich, while the majority will become "developed" and much poorer. Something needs to change ... and fast!

Source: Glenn Barry, 28/7/99, based in: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 19/7/99.