

Africa
Forests under threat
World Rainforest Movement

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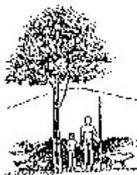
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Africa

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About this book

This book gathers a selection of articles published in the monthly electronic bulletin of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM), addressing the issue of the processes leading to the destruction of African forests and the struggles developed there to protect and use these forests adequately.

The level of detail and analysis in the articles varies greatly, as a consequence of the nature of the bulletin, which is intended to serve as a tool, both for individuals and organisations acting on a local level and for those working on an international scale. However we have included most of the articles as we consider that in some way they can all serve to generate resistance and solidarity movements regarding a subject such as this, of vital importance both for the survival of the African people and for the future of humanity as a whole.

We have not included the numerous sources of information on which the various articles were based, due to a lack of space. However, those who are interested in accessing these sources may do so through our web page, entering the “bulletin” area and looking for the year and month corresponding to the article in question.

Responsibility for this publication is shared between the editor of the bulletin Ricardo Carrere (international coordinator of the WRM) and the numerous individuals and institutions who contributed articles or relevant information for the preparation of articles. Errors that may have been made are the exclusive responsibility of WRM.

Beyond the authorship of the different articles – which finally is of scant importance – the true protagonists of this work are the thousands and thousands of people who suffer from the impacts of deforestation and forest degradation, who resist appropriation of their territories and who generate environmentally and socially appropriate alternatives for its use. The articles attempt to reflect the struggles of these protagonists, with the central aim of supporting them. To all of them, we pay our most sincere homage.

Africa: forests under threat

On analysing the situation of forests in Africa, it is first necessary to begin by clarifying some false assumptions. The first has to do with their location. On looking at maps focussing on the subject, a large green area covering the tropical region of the continent will be seen. The impression it gives is that forests only exist in that area. However, this is not so, as almost all African countries have part of their territory covered by some type of forest, from Mali to South Africa.

Clearly the forests of Mali and South Africa are not the same as the gigantic forest masses of Gabon or the Congo, but this does not mean that they are less important, either from an ecological or from a social standpoint. The fact is that Africa possesses an enormous diversity of forest ecosystems, extending over a major part of the continent.

The second assumption is related to the state of these forests. Here the advertised image does not focus on the tropics, but on the arid, semiarid and savannah regions, where the role of impoverished populations eliminating forests to increase areas for their crops or for cattle-raising, while cutting down the few trees left to provide firewood is underscored. The generalisation of this image is also totally erroneous.

What is true is that most of the forests in Africa are suffering from more or less acute deforestation or degradation, which is not only affecting ecosystems and the means of life of the local populations --and in particular that of women-- but is also having an impact on humanity as a whole through global climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

There is agreement on the need to ensure the conservation of forests in general and those of Africa in particular, but their conservation depends first of all on a sound analysis of the causes behind these processes, and secondly on the adoption of adequate measures to address them. As has been accepted by the various United Nations processes relevant to forests, such causes are divided into direct (or immediate) and indirect (or underlying) causes, the former being a result of the latter.

Evidently, direct causes vary from country to country, in accordance with the specific conditions prevailing in each one, but are mainly linked to the economic resources available in each type of forest.

It is not by accident that, in the case of tropical forests, commercial logging operations are one of the main causes of deforestation and degradation. The reason is very simple, here it is possible to find enormous trees of species having very valuable wood, with a market in the Northern consumer countries. Gabon, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo-Kinshasa, Congo-Brazzaville and Equatorial Guinea are today the countries most whetting the appetites of transnational forestry companies, following their having practically depleted the forests of West Africa.

In other cases, the economic resources are not the forests or their wood, but oil or minerals contained in the ground. The exploitation of these resources has resulted not only in the destruction of considerable forest masses, but also in the widespread contamination of the ecosystem, poisoning soils and water, decimating the local fauna and, what is even worse, affecting the health and living conditions of the local population. Such is the case of Nigeria, Ghana, Madagascar and Tanzania, among others.

In turn, in many countries the land in itself is the most important resource, resulting in the substitution of forests by agricultural crops, both of staples for local sale or commodities for export. Among the latter mention can be made of the plantation of rubber trees, alien species for wood production (pine, eucalyptus, acacia, cypress, etc.) and oil palm. Among these countries, the Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa and Congo-Brazzaville are to be highlighted, where forests and other ecosystems are destroyed to give place to one or more of these crops.

Also as a case of forest substitution by crops, mention can be made of a different kind of farming, that of shrimp farming. Its development has implied the destruction of wide areas of mangroves, in particular in Nigeria, Madagascar, Tanzania and Senegal. In spite of the accumulated world experience on the negative impacts of industrial shrimp farming, there are plans to develop this activity in other coastal counties of the continent and tests have already been carried out to analyse feasibility.

Unlike what has happened in other regions of the world, so far African forests have not suffered from the impacts of the construction of major hydroelectric dams, except for Uganda. Projects announced in Ghana and Kenya have apparently been discontinued. However the possibility

has not been rejected that these and other projects might turn up again in the future.

In the framework of this set of direct causes, affecting wide areas of the continent's forests, the use of firewood by local populations, for years advertised by the "experts" as one of the most important causes of deforestation, is clearly a minor cause, as has been shown by new studies on the subject, among which, mention should be made of a recent one prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank itself¹.

However, whether this is an important direct cause of deforestation or forest degradation or not, the identification of direct causes is no more than a first step in analysing the problem. The second step consists of identifying the conditions that make it possible for the direct causes to be triggered off. That is to say, to identify the chain of causes – the underlying causes – that are behind these processes.

Among these, perhaps the most general and important one, is the economic crisis undergone by the majority of African countries and, in particular, the foreign debt crisis which, in turn is a consequence of other underlying causes such as the North-South imbalance, the deterioration of the terms of trade, the development model being imposed, neo-colonialism, etc. The result is the debt crisis, that makes the affected countries devote themselves to fully exploiting the available resources in order to face the payments demanded by international money-lenders. Increasing volumes of wood, oil, minerals, shrimps, palm oil, rubber, cellulose and innumerable other products are exported with this aim, while the debt, instead of decreasing, is growing. Why? Because the international sum of these increasing volumes being exported makes the prices of those selfsame raw materials drop, obliging the countries to step up the exploitation of their resources to obtain the same income or even lower income in terms of foreign currency.

This evident lack of sense is not the result of the madness of any president or minister, but of the direct or indirect imposition by governments of the North, be it through their embassies and consulates, cooperation agencies, transnational companies or through multilateral

¹ Foley, G.- Sustainable Woodfuel Supplies from the Dry Tropical Woodlands, June 2001, Joint UNDP/World Bank Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme (ESMAP)

bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank or the African Development Bank. The direct intervention of countries such as France or the United States has given rise in some cases to coups d'état to ensure a "president" who, for example, supports the activities of their oil companies. The IMF and multilateral banks are instead much more "civilised." In this case, the mechanism for exploitation is ensured through impositions included in the so-called structural adjustment programmes, promoting the development of certain sectors of the economy to the benefit of transnational companies and consumer markets in the North.

From the above, it appears that some of the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation are determined by external actors, who profit from the weak situation of impoverished countries, impoverishing them even more. But it is also clear that the existence of insatiable consumer markets for the wealth hidden in the forests --from wood to oil-- is also the central cause of this destructive process. Consumption in the North has become unsustainable and its continuous growth is perhaps the most important underlying cause of the destruction of forests in Africa.

Obviously not all the underlying causes are external. There are also internal causes and to a great measure the responsibility falls in this case on the governments and elites of the South.

For example, the national states, arising after independence, maintained part of the unjust provisions which had been imposed in legislation by the colonial governments. Among these, they ensured maintenance of those referring to the appropriation of the communities' forests by the State. This gives the governments legal instruments to dispose of forest resources, thus enabling them to give them in concession to either national or transnational companies. Forests that were traditionally protected by the communities for centuries are thus rapidly destroyed by the concessionaires for their own benefit and for the benefit of those whom, from positions of power, have ensured their exploitation.

At this point, it is important to consider what has for many years led to the almost unanimous agreement among forest experts: poverty as an underlying cause of deforestation. The reasoning was simple: poor people, pushed by their desperate desire for survival, opened up new forest areas to use them for productive activities and cut the last few trees

to cook their food or to obtain income from the sale of firewood or charcoal.

However, it is clear that the above --in many cases true-- is part of a chain of causality and it is not possible to stop there and blame the victims. The poor have become poor for a series of reasons, most of which reside in government policies, both independently and those imposed by external agents such as the IMF or the multilateral banks. These policies may be related to land ownership, market access, agricultural product prices, taxes on production and consumption, credit, etc., having a negative impact on the most underprivileged sectors to the benefit of the business sector. The final result of this chain of causality is the generation of poverty and consequent exploitation of resources by this impoverished population, forced to do so in order to survive. Therefore, the underlying cause of the resulting deforestation is not poverty, but government policies determining the impoverishment process of the people.

But in turn, there are many other government policies at the root of deforestation processes. In the first place we find macro-economic policies prepared in accordance with guidelines imposed by international funding bodies, later complemented by agricultural, mining, oil, forestry, energy, transportation policies, etc., that in turn generate conditions for the adoption of concrete measures resulting in forest destruction and degradation. For example, the policy promoting the production of oil for export --a sectoral policy within the framework of the macro-economic policy-- results in serious deforestation, contamination and degradation of forest ecosystems and in the violation of the human rights of local populations.

The above is a brief summary of situations arising in Africa. To start analysing them at a country level is an unavoidable prior condition for the adoption of measures aimed at halting the process of destruction. Although there are common causes, each country is in a different situation, and therefore conclusions cannot be generalised. While in Cameroon the problem is felling trees, in South Africa the problem is the exact opposite: the plantation of millions of alien trees that are depleting water and biodiversity and becoming an underlying cause of the destruction of native forests. While in Liberia the war is at the root of deforestation, in Congo-Kinshasa it has been an impediment to commercial logging. Therefore each country requires specific studies to reach useful conclusions.

The governments of the region have committed themselves to adopt measures for the protection of forests. So have the governments of the North and multilateral financial institutions. However neither the one nor the other seem to be willing to pass from words to action. What is more, they have not even focused their efforts on the identification of the direct and underlying causes of deforestation. So far it has been the NGOs that have promoted processes for the analysis of such causes and already in 1998 a workshop was organised in Ghana, with the participation of organisations, governments and institutions from various countries of the region to make progress as a whole on this issue. This was the first and transcendental step, but the process did not stop there and since then work has continued. At this time an important group of NGOs are working on the organisation of other workshops in Kenya and Uganda, hoping to generate more awareness and knowledge on such a crucial issue.

But it is not only the NGOs that are giving an example to local governments and multilateral institutions. Local communities and indigenous peoples also do it --perhaps less visibly-- contributing their personal experience in terms of community management of forests and adapting it to the socio-economic situation and to changing policies. Contrary to what was set out above, these populations are generating the "direct and underlying causes" for conservation --and not destruction-- of forests and developing experiences that may be a starting point for sustainable practices regarding the use of forest resources. The experience is there to be used; what is needed is the political will to promote it.

And the example is given above all, as reflected in the majority of the articles in this book, by the people, organisations and communities struggling without respite to protect forests and the rights of the country and its people against the ambition of companies which --in alliance with the governments-- attempt to appropriate these resources with the resulting environmental and social destruction. Here we could mention the names of some individuals whom we very much love and respect, but it would be unjust towards the thousands and thousands of people who struggle --or who have fallen in the struggle-- to defend against their governments, what these have committed themselves to protect. All these people are present as protagonists in this book and to all of them we pay our homage in the most useful way possible: sharing their struggles and experience with those who involve themselves in reading this book.

Ricardo Carrere

Central African Conference on Forests

The second meeting of the Conference on Central African Moist-Forest Ecosystems (CEFDHAC) took place in Bata, Equatorial Guinea from 8 to 10 June 1998. CEFDHAC meets every two years in one of the countries of the sub-region and is the result of the political will expressed by the Central African states in their 1996 Brazzaville meeting. The conference is a concertation framework open to all actors participating in the sub-region's forest sector, particularly politicians (parliamentarians and ministers), forestry experts, the private sector and NGOs, aiming at the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa. At present, countries participating at CEFDHAC are: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and Sao Tome et Principe.

The following Indigenous Peoples' and NGO declarations was presented at that conference:

Indigenous Peoples' Declaration

Declaration by the Indigenous Peoples of Central Africa to the 2nd Conference on Central African Moist Forest Ecosystems (CEFDHAC, or the 'Brazzaville Process').

"We, the indigenous peoples of Central Africa, gathered together under the auspices of our network Coordinating Committee of African Indigenous Peoples, Central African section, have the distinguished honour of putting forward the following recommendations and proposals:

In view of the fact that we are forgotten and marginalised despite being the great trustees and protectors of the equatorial forests of Africa, we ask you to:

1. Involve us in all international and national fora, as well as the major forestry [meetings].
2. Not take premature decisions about the forests without consulting with us and without guaranteeing our right to live there as protectors of the forests, which are for us a paradise.
3. That the Governments recognise the rights of indigenous peoples in financial legislation concerning the inhabitants living in the depths of the forest, without pressurising them or expelling them from their ancestral domain which they consider their paradise.

4. That CEFDHAC in relation to the [proposed] code of conduct [for forestry operations] considers and takes measures guaranteeing the indigenous peoples' right to live in or near the forest so that they can play their role and do not have to exchange their forest way of life for a mundane life without land.
5. That the national and international organisations providing support for protection and conservation of nature are not fooled by non-indigenous peoples who oppose the development and integration of indigenous forest peoples who have been expelled from their ancestral domains without compensation or restitution of other lands.
6. That the Governments create buffer zones for indigenous peoples living in protected areas to enable them to lead their customary lives (hunting, fishing...).
7. That the proceeds of all activities (tourism, industrial exploitation) carried out in the territories of indigenous peoples are shared equitably with the original owners of the land.

Bata, 9 June 1998.

On behalf of the representatives of indigenous peoples of Central Africa, Kapupu Diwa M., President of ONGS A.A. Kalimba Zephyrin, President of CAURWA".

NGOs Declaration

"Your Excellency, the Prime Minister, Head of Government,
Representative of the Head of State of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea;
Your Excellency, the Congolese Minister for Forest Economy,
current chairman of CEFDHAC;
Your Excellencies, Ministers responsible for the forest ecosystems of
Central Africa;
Honourable Members of Parliament;
Distinguished Delegates;
Esteemed Colleagues;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have the honour to speak to this illustrious assembly, to convey our thanks to the Secretariat of CEFDHAC for having recognised our role in giving us the opportunity to express our point of view on the Brazzaville process.

Nevertheless, we wish to express our disappointment about the provisional programme, which could not take our intervention into account, despite the fact that this process claims to be participative, open and democratic.

Please allow us to present the quintessential elements of our Declaration:

We, the NGOs of the Congo Basin,

- considering that the Brazzaville Process is an important platform for collaboration between the different players: states, NGOs, local communities, private sector, working towards sustainable management of forest resources,

- Considering that the Brazzaville Declaration constitutes the political will affirmed by the State of the sub-region to harmonise policies for sustainable management of forest resources,

- Considering the political instability in the sub-region,

- Considering that large-scale development projects are sources of conflict and grave threats to biodiversity,

- Noting the inefficiencies in the current functioning of CEFDHAC due to

1. the instability of national correspondents arising unexpectedly after the change in Ministers responsible for forest ecosystems

2. the laxness of certain national correspondents in setting up contact groups,

- Noting that, despite their participation at different meetings, the NGOs' positions are rarely taken into account,

- Noting that there is still confusion about the role of NGOs in the process,

- Noting that efforts to establish peace are currently inadequate in the Central African sub-region,

- Noting that hasty political decisions are taken to set up large-scale development projects in defiance of the serious and real threats to populations and to biodiversity:

We recommend:

- 1.- Amendments to certain tasks of the organs and principles of functioning of CEFDHAC, notably the principles: 7, concerning conditions of membership; 10, concerning the method of designating national correspondents; 11, concerning the collaboration between the national correspondent and NGOs, and 15, concerning the method of designating the contact groups, as defined in the workshop on programming the activities of CEFDHAC at Kinshasa.
- 2.- Effective involvement of NGOs in decision-making (meetings and steering committee) and in carrying out the action plan
- 3.- Establishment of real mechanisms to promote peace in the Central African sub-region.
- 4.- Completion of genuine and transparent environmental impact studies before carrying out any development project.

Bata, 7 June 1998.

NGOs of Central Africa". August 1998.

In defence of Central African forests

A group of environmental NGOs - by means of a letter dated October 22 1998 - addressed Mr Henri Djombo, Minister of Forest Economy of the Republic of Congo, to express their disapproval regarding a number of actions carried out by him, believed to be aimed at undermining the Brazzaville Process.

The Brazzaville process is trying to build a concertation framework open to all actors participating in the sub-region's forest sector, aiming at the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa.

"The forests of Central Africa may suffer a similar fate of those in the West African region unless a process promoting transparency, broad consultation and coordination involving all stakeholders, especially those at the community level, can take root" expressed the signatory NGOs, in support of the Brazzaville process. November 1998.

Have small farmers deforested West Africa?

Not according to British researchers James Fairhead and Melissa Leach. Their book "Reframing Deforestation, Global Analysis and Local Realities: Studies in West Africa", published by Routledge Press, uses extensive historical evidence from archives, travelers' reports, and oral accounts for Benin, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Togo to show claims of massive forest loss in these countries have been greatly exaggerated.

Specifically, they find that:

- * These countries have lost some 10 million hectares of forest since 1900, not 25-50 million hectares as previously claimed,
- * Much of the so-called 'forest zone' has probably never been forest,
- * Forest has expanded into savanna in many places along the forest zone's northern margins,
- * Farmers occupied many supposedly 'primary' forests during recent history,
- * Historically, population decline has been as important in regional forest cover change as population growth,
- * Farmers do not only destroy forests. They frequently help create them,
- * Bush fallow and isolated forest patches and trees often indicate farmer enrichment of landscapes, not degradation.

The authors do not deny significant deforestation has taken place or that small farmers sometimes degrade their environments. They simply argue the extent of destruction has been over stated and farmers' positive roles largely ignored.

Existing myths persist, in part, because forestry and conservation agencies find them useful. By claiming small farmers threaten forests they did not create these groups can justify their own control over forest resources and limiting farmers' access to those resources. Exaggerating the extent of deforestation and forest degradation can help obtain political support and funding. December 1998.

Resistance to oil industry

A workshop on "Petroleum and Local Resistance", organized by Environmental Rights Action, took place at Port Harcourt, Nigeria, from 9

to 14 February 1999. Oilwatch Africa also held its assembly in the same place. Delegates from several countries in the region - Cameroon, Ghana, Gabon, Chad and Nigeria - as well as representatives of Oilwatch International attended both events, after which the group made a trip to oil fields in the Niger Delta, where a strong conflict between Shell and the indigenous Ogoni people is ongoing.

Several important issues were addressed, such as the situation of the oil industry in tropical countries, the relationship between oil exploitation, local communities and resistance, the role of the State, the conflict over the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, the role of the global economy. Experiences of local struggles -as that of the Ogoni people- were also presented.

In relation with the above, several US environmental NGOs organized for March 21 a rally in North Arlington, USA, to protest against Shell's activities in the Niger Delta. The multinational company started its activities in this area in 1958. While the company has in that period extracted oil valued in more than US\$ 30 billion from the lands of the Ogoni people, in return, they have only received spoiled farmland, poisoned water reservoirs and toxic air. To this day, despite pleas from indigenous communities in the Niger Delta - particularly the Ogonis - and millions of supporters around the world, Shell has done nothing to clean up its oil fields, claiming lack of funds to be devoted to that activity. Nevertheless the company has recently announced that US\$ 8.5 billion will be invested over the next 20 years on a new oil and gas project in the Niger Delta. March 1999.

Carbon sinks and money needs

Plantation projects using tree monocultures to sequester carbon being implemented in Uganda by two Norwegian firms constitute a paradigmatic example of the rationale and the consequences of this kind of projects.

The Norwegian company Tree Farms established itself in Uganda in 1996, and has one afforestation project in progress. Additionally, the Norwegian Afforestation Group got the authorities' agreement on a project in November 1999. The former - which operates in the Bukaleba Reserve - area has already started a project to set up between 80,000 and 100,000 hectares of plantations of pines and eucalyptus. Such scheme is very similar to that adopted by the Dutch foundation FACE in the Ecuadorian Andes and so are its consequences.

A recent research in the field performed by the Norwegian NGO NorWatch shows that both projects - and particularly the one of Tree Farms - have been possible thanks to the bargain price of the land leased to the companies and to the corruption reigning at decision-makers' level in Uganda. Moreover, the Tree Farms project has already provoked the eviction of some 8,000 people from 13 villages from their lands - mainly farmers and fisherfolk - now occupied by the company. Local peasants even have to pay for the agricultural use of their own lands under the "taungya" system, and the company exploits them since their weeding and managing of trees during these first years is not paid. Uganda's sovereignty is also under siege with this project, since during a period of 50 years, the country will not have the option to change land use, and, additionally Uganda will not be allowed to use these carbon sinks for its own carbon accounts.

The same forestry company Treefarms has announced a project to plant fast-growing pine and eucalyptus trees on 150 square kilometres of grassland plains in neighbouring Tanzania. Taking into account this company's sad record in Uganda, it is feared that such scheme will have the same deleterious consequences on people - especially poor peasants - and the environment. In a recent climate-related meeting in Bonn, the Tanzanian official representative pointed out the need to take into account not only forestry in itself but also the welfare of local communities. How can this view be reconciled with top-down carbon sink afforestation projects?

Given the economic crisis currently faced by many other African countries - particularly in the tropics - their governments will be probably prone to accepting any deals which may result in hard currency investments, regardless of the negative social and environmental impacts they will entail. Plantation-related carbon sink initiatives may well be one of them. Although the advantages for industrialized countries are obvious - cheap sequestering of their carbon emissions - it is equally clear that local people and their environment will suffer the consequences and reap no benefits. What Africa needs from industrialized countries is certainly not this type of "aid" and calling this a "Clean Development Mechanism" is - to say the least - an insult to African people, because no development at all will be involved in such carbon deals. August 2000.

Nothing much at the Central African forestry ministerial conference held in Cameroon

The first conference of Central African forestry ministers took place in Yaoundé from 4-7 December 2000, within the framework of the follow-up of the implementation of the decisions of the Heads of States Summit held in Yaoundé in March 1999. The ministerial meeting had been preceded in September by a meeting of experts from the forestry departments of the Central African countries. The aims of the organizers of the event - as could be perceived clearly from the agenda - were the following:

- The adoption of a sub-regional action plan for the sustainable management of forests. The plan - described as a convergence plan - aimed at defining realistic objectives for the sub-region, also indicating national activities to be carried out by each State aimed at moving towards the objective. The need for convergence is explained by the differences in the levels of forestry development in the different countries of the region.
- The adoption of a monitoring mechanism to coordinate the implementation of the convergence plan. The option for a flexible and agile executive secretariat (composed by one or two persons) was put forward, particularly for budgetary reasons. The organizational structure included the following authorities: the heads of states summit, the ministerial conference (every two years), the executive secretariat, a consultative sub-regional expert forum with participation of the forestry experts of the sub-region, role currently played by CEFDHAC (Conference on Central African Moist-Forest Ecosystems), and national fora.
- The adoption of a funding mechanism for the convergence plan. The main issue was that of finding a long-lasting funding mechanism, in order to reduce dependence in relation with funders. There was a proposal for the creation of a fiduciary fund.
- The signing of the Yaoundé Declaration by the Democratic Republic of Congo, which expressed its wish to join the process.
- The decision on the place where the next ministerial meeting would take place, which would be the starting point for a feeling of ownership of the process by the other countries of the sub-region (until now, all meetings have been held in Cameroon).

The meeting was a failure for the following reasons:

1. From the participation point of view. Seven delegations were expected, headed by their ministers. Six delegations were present and actually only three headed by their ministers (Cameroon, Congo, and Central African Republic). The Central African Republic minister could only attend thanks to a special plane sent by WWF. The ministers from Chad and Gabon sent their excuses at the last minute without explaining their reasons. Some sources expressed that the Gabonese minister had been dissuaded to participate by his staff (which had preceded him to the meeting) to come to Yaoundé. The minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo could not attend the meeting because he had been appointed to office only two weeks before the meeting. It is quite clear that the Central African States lack the political will to make this process move forward and to truly work for the promotion of the sustainable management of forests.

2. From a substance point of view. The main documents were not adopted. The convergence plan was not really discussed. The main actions to be implemented at the national level were identified. Additionally, the ministers could not reach an agreement either on the monitoring or on the funding mechanisms. In relation with the funding mechanisms, the ministers ordered a supplementary study in order to be able to better understand the way in which the fiduciary fund would work.

3. The adjournment until March. The ministers decided to meet in March 2001 to analyse the issues not agreed upon during this meeting, which will delay the process in at least three months.

Finally, it is important to highlight that while the "convergence plan" may have some positive aspects, it almost totally ignores the role and rights of local populations, as well as the role of civil society in general in relation with the management of forests. Such attitude, linked to the fact that the central issue of governance in the forestry sector is not included in the plan's objectives and coupled with the obvious lack of the governments' political will, provides little hope for sustainable forest management in the region. December 2000.

European Union's major responsibility over deforestation

In spite of the fact that the situation in the Congo Basin has been much less publicized than that of the Amazon Basin, the truth is that deforestation has reached alarming rates in the six countries lying within

the basin (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon). On 11 September 2001, Friends of the Earth and Forests Monitor presented to the media the conclusions from a number of case studies on the social, environmental and economic impacts resulting from the activities of European forestry corporations in Central Africa. The NGO Forests Monitor has focused its work on studying the case of the Congo Basin and for that purpose carried out a study on the impacts of the European industry on the forest. The study reveals that more than 11 million hectares are being currently exploited by European companies, most of which are French. Additionally, France is the main European importer of wood from the Congo Basin, with 19 per cent of total imports.

The way in which France-based companies operate (Bolloré, Rougier, Thanry, Interwood, Pasquet) is particularly alarming. Those companies usually operate without any forest management plan and they rarely comply with existing legislation. Tree felling outside the concession area, cutting without respecting the established minimum exploitation diameters and the cutting of endangered species constitute common practices for this group of companies.

In relation with the economic and social benefits resulting from industrial logging the conclusions are equally worrying. Forestry industry promoters present this activity as the best option for the use of Central African forests, underscoring the direct benefits resulting from employment generation and infrastructure development such as school buildings, health centres and churches. The report shows a more complex and much less positive reality. In 1999, in spite of the fact that the value of the wood imported by the European Union from Central African countries reached 609 million dollars, local communities received little or none of that money. In this way, the large European companies continue appropriating the African forest resources.

The European Union is currently the main importer of tropical wood from the Congo Basin, with 63 per cent of imports (1999 data). "The European consumer countries must acknowledge their responsibility and adopt concrete measures to eradicate illegal wood production and trade, among other things banning the import of that wood and imposing strong economic sanctions to those European companies involved in this type of commerce", stated Samuel Nguiffo from Friends of the Earth Cameroon. By: Frédéric Castell. December 2001.

Logging one of the world's largest areas of primary rainforest

Six Central African countries - Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo (Brazzaville), the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire), Cameroon and the Central African Republic - share the rainforest ecosystem of the Congo Basin, which is home to one of the world's largest contiguous blocks of tropical rainforest, only second to that of the Amazon Basin in South America in terms of not fragmented forest areas.

Already well-known are the ecosystem services - watershed protection, maintenance of water quality and supply, regulation of local climate patterns and conservation of biological diversity - provided by such region, which is also home to a whole range of peoples with diverse cultures who depend on those forests for food, shelter and medicines.

Central African rainforests have also gained outstanding importance after the depletion of neighbouring West Africa's rainforests through logging, fragmentation and clearing for agriculture. However, worrying as it may be, the governments of Central African countries, pressed by multilateral and bilateral creditors, are following a similar path by promoting industrial timber exploitation for export under structural adjustment and liberalisation policies. Meanwhile, local peoples have been excluded from decision-making processes which disregard their needs and lead to the destruction of their homes and livelihoods.

Commercial logging has been eroding more easily accessed coastal Central African rainforests for more than 40 years, and now is expanding to the remote interior forests of the Congo Basin. According to available data, Central Africa's forests cover 1.863.000 km², of which 68% in large contiguous blocks unbroken by public roads. However, it is important to underscore that the situation is rapidly changing for the worse, because 41% of those pristine areas have been allocated to commercial logging concessions, ranging from 33% in Congo (Zaire) to 68% in Equatorial Guinea.

Although focused on the most commercially valuable species, logging implies large-scale operations and has been identified as one of the primary causes of global deforestation, mainly because it entails the construction of roads to access forests and to transport logs extracted from them. The expansion of commercial logging opens a network of access routes into previously remote areas, with negative ecological impacts - deforestation, forest fragmentation, microclimate changes, biodiversity loss, changes in quality and quantity in local hydrology -

negative social impacts - dispossession of local peoples' lands, loss of livelihoods, human rights abuses - and unsustainable economic activities such as clearing for large scale agriculture and commercial bushmeat hunting. In all regions, commercial logging becomes the first step in deforestation processes.

Along the 1990s, timber exports (logs, sawnwood, veneer and plywood) from Central Africa steadily increased, with Europe as major importer from 1993 to 1999, though surpassed in 1996-97 by Asian countries. Given the financial and logistic resources required to carry out long-term, large-scale operations, most of the logging activities are in the hands of foreign multinational groups working within a complex web of subsidiaries, involving local and foreign companies.

National policies actually promote the same forest exploitation model brought about earlier by colonial powers to exploit forests as a source of timber under logging concessions. This heavy heritage, coupled with minimum standards in terms of forestry management practices as well as weak regulating, monitoring and enforcement capacity, has turned governments of Central Africa into an easy prey to the greed of transnational corporations, which find their way to concessions through the conditionalities imposed on governments by multilateral financial institutions and the World Trade Organisation.

The forest-for-export pattern does not have room for hunter-gatherers, small farmers and fisherfolk, nor for biodiversity conservation. It does not have room for the spiritual and cultural identities of the forest peoples or for long-term benefits equitably shared by local populations. It is high time the economic powers and the governments at least stop telling lies when arguing that industrial timber production contributes to poverty alleviation, when it is widely known and well documented that exploitation of forests cause an increase in poverty and that forestry development and deforestation generally go hand in hand, with a redistribution of wealth that benefits a minority (national elites and foreign companies), widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

The international community has acknowledged the key role of forests and has committed itself to conserve them through global processes such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. The international community obviously includes the governments of the six countries of the region, but also the governments of the European, Asian and other countries where most of the wood extracted is consumed, as well as those from the home countries of the logging corporations currently destroying and fragmenting

this unique forest ecosystem. In this case, complying with commitments clearly implies the recognition that action to protect these forests must prevail over actions which destroy them, and that a concerted effort must be made by the international community to ensure that end. May 2002.

NGO statement at Ministerial Meeting on illegal logging

The following statement was issued by a number of African NGOs present at the African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Ministerial Planning Meeting held in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo on June 18 - 21, 2002:

"There is little doubt that forest crimes is pervasive and causing enormous damage to the environment and the economy as well as hurting the poor the most. Almost everywhere, forest resources are under the threat of criminal activities by unscrupulous loggers, traders, and corrupt government officials.

We, the local NGOs present at this meeting, consider it not only necessary, but appropriate, to take a clear position - dwelling on our experiences and from an NGO perspective - on the issue (illegal logging) under discussion. Therefore, in addition to the points already raised and to put some of the points raised into a much more focused and issue specific context, we hereby present the following points for consideration:

Problems/ Issues

1. Unhindered trade in "Conflict Timber"

- during armed conflicts, non-state actors (rebel groups/ factions) engage in granting concessions and/ or engage in logging activities strictly to finance their war efforts
- international/ regional governments have shown a high degree of indifference to these issues

2. Lack of transparency

- lack of mechanisms for independent forest monitoring activities by NGOs and local/ indigenous communities

3. Inadequate support to NGOs for independent monitoring

- capacity building

- financial support

4. Developed countries support to multinationals engaged in illegal logging in producer countries (Africa)

Action Points

- Regional governments and the international community to impose a ban on trade in conflict timber

- Governments operate/ manage the forest sector in a transparent manner, i.e from negotiating concessions agreements through to trade in forest products

- Donor and international community to integrate conditionalities directed at addressing illegal logging and other forest crimes, in aid/ grant negotiations

- Governments to adopt legislations that allow/ provide for the effective involvement of local communities in forest management and for the free operation of NGOs

- Donor community encourage and support independent monitoring, of logging activities, by NGOs and local/ indigenous communities

- Developed countries halt support to (their national companies) engaged in illegal logging in Africa as well as impose a ban on the importation of forest products from 'unmanaged' forests".

Statement presented by: Save My Future (SAMFU) Foundation, Liberia, Friends of the Nation, Ghana, Centre l'Environnement et le Développement (CED), Cameroun, Comité Consultatif des ONG de Conservation et de l'Environnement (CCOCE), Congo, Conseil Provincial des ONG de Kinshasa, Congo/ Kinshasa, Comité de liaison des ONG du Congo (CLONG - Congo), Congo. By: Silas Siakor. June 2002.

ANGOLA

War destroys forests

Deforestation has become one of Angola's most important environmental problems, also resulting in freshwater shortages and soil erosion. The long civil war that affected Angola from 1975 to 1991 and the continuous hostilities among rival groups that have persisted since then, have determined not only human and material losses but also brought with

them severe consequences on forests. Deforestation is considered one of the major environmental results of this state of violence and devastation.

Between 1992 and 1994 about one million and a half people were displaced because of war. To satisfy their urgent needs for firewood for cooking and heating they cut down extensive areas of forests and tree plantations. Their forced nomadic state and lack of any means of survival and income earnings translates into an accelerated damage to the forests. The loss of the forest cover enhances land erosion. Deforestation affects all of Angola, but it is worse in the war-ravaged central highlands. There the heavy downpours of the rainy season wash out the fertile topsoil from the treeless plains.

Considering that Angola is Africa's second oil producer after Nigeria, the population of this country should have easy access to oil as an alternative to fuelwood. Nevertheless, it is only available for the inhabitants of the capital Luanda, while peasants, who are the majority of the population, are still almost entirely dependent on fuelwood which, coupled with the consequences of war, has led to massive forest. November 1999.

CAMEROON

Who conserves and who destroys forests?

The use of Cameroon's forests is oriented to the logic of private accumulation and economic interests, regardless of the interests of the Pygmy population that depends on those forests for their survival. Forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate, due to the high prices of some types of wood in the international market, to the weight of the country's external debt and to the collusion of government officials and international forestry companies.

The government and corporations view forests as wood to be sold for large sums of money. The Pygmy population see forests in a totally different manner. As a Bakola woman says:

"... we are in the midst of huge desolation, we no longer recognise the forest, we no longer understand what is happening. Our forests change from one day to the next. What future awaits our children? The settlements destroy the forest, and the felling of trees prevents us from gathering honey to feed our children. The noise of their huge machines is causing the animals to flee far away. The trees falling into the rivers

muddy the river beds. Some fruits are becoming scarce and we have to walk for a long time to find them. And the mushrooms we used to gather everywhere are gone. ... our children have no future. Where will they find animals to hunt? The bark, the leaves and the fruits for curing and eating?"

Honey, meat, fish, water, fruit, mushrooms, medicine, firewood, wood: all this and much more is how these indigenous peoples view their forest. Wood for industry is the only product which the government and corporations see in the forest. The former viewpoint ensures forest conservation, while the latter is leading to forest destruction. September 1997.

EU fosters rainforest destruction

International "aid for development" is a major cause of forest destruction in many countries. This is exemplified in the case of Cameroon by the European Union, which plans to give a 55 million ECU grant to the government for road projects in the Southern region of the country. Cameroon has not explained which roads are to be built or rehabilitated and no environmental impact assessment studies have been carried out for these projects.

This is not new, since in the past the EU has already funded such road projects. For example, the EU gave 600,000 ECU for the rehabilitation of the Abong Mbang road to Lomé in the Cameroon rainforests. As a result, illegal timber exploitation and poaching expanded rapidly, using the new roads as ways of access to the forest. The pygmy population is losing its life-supporting resources from the forest and its social organisation is uprooted. At the same time, poaching has provoked an immense damage to the populations of gorillas and chimpanzees that are typical of that zone of the globe.

European environmental NGOs are lobbying against the concession of such grant, considering that the new projected roads would pave the way for logging companies to move into unexploited areas. The concession of the grant will be discussed at the European Development Fund Committee in mid June. NGOs are inviting individuals and organizations in that continent to protest to their respective governments, and to request that the details of the road projects are discussed publicly, that full environmental impact assessments are made before the grant is

approved, and that Cameroonian authorities exert effective control of poaching and illegal logging. May 1999.

Timber ban relaxed

Forests in Cameroon are being destroyed at an alarming rate, due to the high prices of some types of precious wood in the international market, to the weight of the country's external debt and to the collusion of some government officials and forestry companies, especially French.

Two months ago the country's government established a ban on timber exports that was considered a way of protecting the forests from abusive exploitation. Nevertheless pressures made by influential French timber operators appear to have been so strong that the authorities recently gave a step backwards by issuing a new decree that permits the export of 30% of the country's timber, while the remaining seventy per cent is to be processed locally. It is to be mentioned that timber exports account for a majority of Cameroon's foreign exchange revenue. August 1999.

Structural adjustment promotes deforestation

Logging is one of the most important direct causes of the accelerated loss of tropical forests. However, macroeconomic strategies implemented by Southern countries' governments under the pressure of powerful actors such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) provide an even stronger incentive for increasing unsustainable logging practices. Cameroon is but one of many examples showing the impacts of such policies on the disappearing rainforests.

Cameroon is known as one of the most ecologically diverse countries on the African Continent. Between coastal mangrove swamps and Mount Cameroon, West Africa's highest mountain, lies a hot and humid southern region of dense tropical forests of mahogany, ebony and obeche trees. There are over 9,000 plant species in Cameroon, 150 of which are found nowhere else in the world. Cameroon's forest resources are estimated at 22 million hectares of which 14 million are tropical rainforest. Intensive logging, encouraged by IMF policy reforms, now threatens the country's tropical rainforests and the habitat of over 40 species of wildlife including black rhinoceros, gorillas and elephants.

In the late 1980s, the IMF imposed a structural adjustment programme on the government, which was supposed to solve the country's critical economic situation. Part of this programme relied on the promotion of non traditional exports - timber included - which was fostered by the devaluation of the currency. The IMF recommended export tax cuts also played an important role in the increase of timber exports. Between 1994 and 1995 the number of logging enterprises increased from 194 to 351, while lumber exports jumped a 49.6% between 1995/96 and 1996/97. It is estimated that 200,000 hectares of forests are destroyed annually in Cameroon.

The destruction of natural resources resulting from such policy goes together with poverty. Already in 1991 a report of the World Bank stated that by 1985, long before adjustment measures hit many incomes - many of them related to the direct access to forest products and services - 40% of the rural population were in a state of absolute poverty. A decade of structural adjustment has not but aggravated the situation of forest and forest-dependent communities. In a recent report the IMF itself has acknowledged the precarious nature of Cameroon's export strategy. November 1999.

Forest sector development in a difficult political economy

The OED (Operations Evaluation Department) report considers that even if the Bank influenced the ongoing process of forest policy reform in Cameroon, it "made no provisions for implementation or enforcement of those provisions". The document states that the Bank did not attempt all the right and relevant things prescribed by the 1991 policy, and made several mistakes from a strategic point of view. As a result there is a gap between the stated policies and their implementation.

On the implementation of the Forest Policy on the ground, the OED report concludes that the capital failure in the case of Cameroon has not been the policy in itself or the coherence between the intervention of the Bank inside and outside the forest sector and its forest policy objectives, but the ineffective and inefficient way in which things were done.

The failure in promoting local communities' participation in the process - despite the declared objective - is underscored. The exclusive reliance on technical assistance and the lack of incentives to develop local institutions is underlined as a mistake of the Bank. According to the report, the Bank

had good intentions in trying to promote the interest of local communities, but it did little to gather their views and to design mechanisms that would ensure that those views were taken into consideration. This was clear during the process that ended in the 1994 Forest Law. As stated in the report, "ordinary people whose livelihoods directly depend on forest resources were left out of the decision making". Additionally the programme did not include activities to enhance the capacity of the civil society or to promote rural development, and the strategy also lacked a proper information policy.

The report admits that the foreign logging companies that dominate the sector continue to have a free hand in the development and use of the forest resources in Cameroon, and are very influential actors trying that no reforms in the forest sector are applied, which can go against their privileges. According to the report, logging is one of the four dynamic mechanism of forest resource degradation and deforestation described by the 1991 Forest Policy. Additionally, logging is responsible for a larger overall share of deforestation than is usually reported. The OED report clearly identifies the existence of an environmental conflict between public interests represented by the government and civil society, and private interests defended by the companies.

With respect to the effects on forests of other policies implemented by the Bank, the report considers that although the Bank has undertaken little direct forest investment over the past decade, forest sector issues have been part of the Bank-financed Structural Adjustment Programme since 1989. According to the OED "the Bank has been trying to follow a multisectoral approach in Cameroon" and to involve local populations in forest management. Nevertheless the results in this regards can be considered poor. Moreover, it is the powerful logging companies operating in the country who have benefited from the opening of the economy that the Bank is promoting worldwide. In sum, while the OED report largely blames the government for its failure to pull Cameroon out of the economic crisis, it also clearly admits that ten years of Bank structural adjustment efforts failed to improve things and that its structural adjustment programs did not put poverty at the center stage of the reform agenda.

The support to road building and the case of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline are also mentioned. The 5th Highway Project Loan of the WB determined the opening up and greater exploitation of the frontier forests of the East Province, which constitute a threat to the livelihoods of the indigenous

Baka forest people, and has provoked a serious impact on the fauna of the region. The report admits that the Chad-Cameroon pipeline megaproject is a polemic issue and that the arguments of the NGOs against it in relation to corruption and human rights are very hard to dismiss. It also considers that the Bank is very sensitive to these concerns. Nevertheless, no explanation is provided on which steps have been taken in this regard.

Additionally, the report states that the results of the 1991 Forest Policy in relation to the Bank's mandate of reducing poverty were not satisfactory. The concentration of power in the hands of the logging industry is another problem not addressed by the Bank's policy, even if it is a factor of poverty generation in Cameroon. On the contrary smallholder agriculture, contributes directly to more than 2 million livelihoods. The OED insists in pointing out that, given the importance of this objective and the fact that a key determinant of poverty is inequality in the distribution of social decision power, the Bank should have insisted on this issue.

In its Summary Evaluation, the OED report concludes that with the 1991 Forest Policy Cameroon did not improve its forest cover. The improvement in the way the country addresses forest sector issues is negligible, as well as the impact of the Bank's strategy to overcome poverty.

To our view the most interesting points highlighted in the OED report are:

- the problem is not the policy in itself but its implementation;
- in spite of the Bank's stated intentions, participation of local communities and forest peoples has been neglected;
- logging companies constitute a powerful lobby which opposes the reform in the forest sector and benefits from the economic policy at the national level promoted by the Bank;
- other policies influenced by the Bank - e.g. structural adjustment, road building, fossil-fuel megaprojects - have had negative effects on forest sustainability;
- the Bank has not accomplished its mandate of reducing poverty, and the situation tends to worsen;
- the Bank was not influential in ameliorating the forest situation in Cameroon. February 2000.

Tree plantations: a false alternative to deforestation

A number of tree plantation programmes were implemented in Cameroon in the 1950s, when the territory was under French colonial rule, allegedly to address the process of destruction affecting the country's rich rainforests. As a result, about 40,000 hectares of plantations were set up in a period of 50 years, 25,000 of which in areas formerly occupied by dense rainforest, and the remaining 15,000 hectares in the savannah. Indigenous species - such as dibetou, okoumé, ilomba and iroko - were used to reforest woodlands, while in the savannah both native and exotic species - among which eucalyptus and acacia - were used.

Although the stated aim of the authorities was to restore "the natural forest" in fact such plantations were not only not the solution, but have caused negative impacts.

The main reason for this failure is that a plantation of one or two single species - even native ones - is not a forest, since it lacks its biodiversity and complexity. A forest is the product of a long coevolution process among its different components - including humans - and the ecological conditions of the site. The recovery of a rainforest in tropical areas is a very difficult task with uncertain results, since the former conditions cannot be recreated artificially all of a sudden.

Afforestation with eucalyptus has made matters even worse. Eucalyptus planted by the National Bureau for Forest Regeneration - as if forests could be "regenerated" using eucalyptus! - in the last two years caused soil acidification and a drastic drop in the fish population of the rivers nearby the plantation. They have increased the risk of fires in the savannah and are held responsible for the increase of severe floods.

Since in Cameroon the state claims property over all trees, plantations have provoked conflicts over land tenure between the government and local communities. Additionally, they have generated other problems, as in the case of the northern Sahel region, where local peasants complain that tree plots shelter crop-devastating bird and animals that have brought hunger and misery with them. It is feared that in case tree plantations are accepted as carbon sinks by the Convention on Climate Change, the ongoing projects will be reinforced and new ones will be implemented, thus increasing the level of negative impacts on people and the environment.

Halting the deforestation and forest degradation process in Cameroon requires to address and overcome the real causes of the problem, among which the depredatory activities of logging companies and the International Monetary Fund's imposed policies promoting the exploitation of timber to increase the country's export revenues. Tree plantations are not the solution - they are not forests - and will instead only add to the problem. October 2000.

Research questions myths about fuelwood use and deforestation

A study, published by IITA and CIFOR in 1997, on the production and consumption of firewood and the relationship between this use of wood and deforestation in southern Cameroon shows interesting results, which question some of the myths related to the responsibility of the rural poor in forest destruction as well as on the alleged benefits of plantations to counteract it.

Previous studies in Africa showed that agriculture contributes as much as and even more than the use of firewood to forest destruction. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example 5 million hectares of forests were converted to croplands between 1966 and 1980 and some 3 million cubic metres of wood were destroyed - not even used as firewood - which was more than the total volume of wood exported during the same period. Recent research focused on the issue of energy concluded that agriculture is the main cause of deforestation in Africa. A study by the World Bank dated in 1987 even asserts that although deforestation is usually linked to the cutting of trees to obtain firewood, the opposite is what usually happens: firewood is the by-product of land-clearance for agriculture. This is true to the rainforest area of Cameroon, where vast areas have been cut down, ploughed up and converted into croplands. Firewood is collected from the remainings of such trees. On the contrary, in the Sahel region of the country, where shrubs dominate the landscape, firewood is obtained from cutting the branches of the scarce trees while ensuring their conservation.

The research proves that urbanization, extension of areas occupied by crops, and deforestation for the obtention of firewood are correlated. In the densely populated areas of Yaoundé and its surroundings, where firewood consumption is high and where there has been a strong pressure on forests by agriculture, forests have almost disappeared. However, in

the more rural area of Ebolowa, forest reserves are more abundant since firewood supply is by far greater than its demand. Additionally, the work confirms that the consumption of firewood by rural households for cooking and heating does not pose a threat to forests, since volumes used are reduced and there is a quick regeneration of the resource.

The study clearly shows that generalizations about the relationship between firewood use and deforestation cannot be made, because many variables need to be taken on board, such as population density - both rural and urban - the nature of the activities carried out by small farmers, the proximity of urban centres, urban demand for firewood, the quality of highways, etc. For instance, villages near the main urban centres sell large quantities of firewood, both obtained from agricultural land-clearances and from wood cut from forest reserves. On the contrary, fuelwood is not at all sold in distant rural areas, where wood supply is far greater than fuelwood demand and wood from land clearance - the main cause of deforestation in this case - is left to rot in place.

Confirming the conclusions of previous studies, the study also shows that plantations for firewood are not an adequate measure to provide this resource and to diminish the pressure on forests. This type of solution was promoted by governments and development agencies considering that it could also bring with it positive side effects, such as job creation and income generation. None of this ever happened in reality. Small peasants in Cameroon as well as in India, for example, prefer to set up multiple use plantations - whose products can be sold at good prices in the market - than plantations merely aimed at obtaining firewood.

In sum, deforestation processes in Africa cannot be explained by simplistic analyses too often used to put the blame on the poor. The same is applicable to solutions. There are enormously different situations in Africa and within African countries and those different situations need to be taken into account before making generalizations and implementing solutions. February 2001.

Oil palm, people and the environment

Oil palm plantations in Cameroon cover more than 80,000 hectares divided in three different sectors:

- 1) large scale industrial plantations, with some 58,000 hectares;

- 2) Village plantations comprising 12,000 hectares and
- 3) "Informal" plantations covering some 10,000 hectares.

Village plantations were promoted by the state for the supply of the large state-owned plantation and processing companies. The former are plantations which are contractually obliged to deliver, at market prices, their entire production to the processing plants of the - now privatised - agroindustries: SOCAPALM, CAMDEV or PAMOL. The "market price" is obviously established by these enterprises, which at the local level constitute absolute monopolies.

The above situation has recently led to an increasing gap between small producers and large estates. The "informal" plantations have increased and deliveries of palm fruit to large processing plants have progressively diminished. Villagers prefer to either process their harvest themselves or sell to smaller processing units, from whom they usually obtain a higher price and cash payments. Until the early 1990's, the price established by the companies was considered to be too low, which led to diverting small-scale production to other buyers. Once it became evident that the agroindustries' own production was insufficient to cover their processing needs, they were forced to increase the price offered to outgrowers (from 26-31 francs CFA to 40-50 francs), in order to ensure raw material supply to the processing plants.

It is thus obvious that the complementarity between village plantations and the agroindustries has not been successful and that their relationship has been more based on competition than on complementarity. The sole fact that village planters refuse to even communicate their exact plantation areas to the companies is self-explanatory of this relationship.

Additionally, it is important to stress that the establishment of large-scale plantations has often been preceded by the expropriation of land of the neighbouring villages, without adequate compensation. According to the Cameroonian law, peasants do not own the land by customary right, and thus expropriation does not require compensation on the part of the State. This land property formula was already used in the times of colonization for expropriating the land of peasants and then transferring it, without cost, to new settlers, who could then grow their crops. After national independence, this practice continued in force, now for the benefit of local élites.

The establishment of large private palm plantations - normally located in the surroundings of villages - requires considerable extensions of land,

and several cases have already been reported of conflict arising with local communities living in the area from the modality and conditions of land acquisition by outsiders, who, with the support of the government, obtain lands over which they had no previous customary right. However, by cultivating an evergreen plant, like oil palm, they are entitled to permanent customary rights, which guarantee their rights in detriment of the local population.

In addition, oil palm plantations have resulted in a number of environmental impacts, among which deforestation, biodiversity loss and pollution due to extensive use of agrochemicals. All those impacts result in loss of livelihoods for local people and the deterioration of the environment in which they live.

It is important to highlight that no food crops are allowed within plantations, even at the early establishment phase of plantations, where local people could be allowed to cultivate food crops until palms start interlocking canopies. The socio-economic and environmental impacts of these plantations on adjoining towns and villages need to be investigated to reflect issues related to:

- Availability of local food staples (food more expensive in Limbe), forest foods supportive system (non timber forest products are expensive and need to be imported from other parts of the country), availability of local craft items and alternative income opportunities (income of plantation workers is very low).
- Impacts associated to deforestation, as various hazardous floods are now common in the zone (Limbe and Ekondo-Titi cases in 2001 and 1998 respectively).
- Impacts of pollution from agrochemicals, as there are claims that chemicals banned in industrialized countries are still being used by these corporations on the grounds of reduced cost, lack of supervision by the State.
- Impacts on human health, as plantations are located close to human habitations, and aircraft sprays drift to towns from sister banana plantations.
- Impacts associated to pest infestation and infectious diseases due to plantations.

- The enclavement of towns as there are no opportunities for expansion and hill settlement has become a common phenomenon, with implications for upstream and downstream conflicts emanating.

- Impacts on soil chemical/physical/biological properties from palm oil.

production effluents discharged into open land during processing, which render the land useless for any agricultural purposes. In spite of the existence of opportunities for converting the effluents into useful products, they continue being discharged untreated into the environment.

With the above impact assessment carried out, alternative positions to monocultural plantations can be suggested to reflect more environmentally-friendly approaches to land use patterns in the sub-region. June 2001.

Unequal equality between community forests and logging companies

According to Cameroonian law, both local communities and industrial logging companies have the right to obtain and manage a portion of a forest. However, this apparent "equality" is extremely unequal regarding the extension of forest lands and the legal obligations associated with tenure rights.

Regarding management obligations for instance, in the case of community forests the management plan has to be submitted before any activity starts. This constitutes a major constraint because communities face great difficulties to raise the funds to elaborate their management plans, and should therefore be authorised to at least cut a limited number of trees to finance the preparation of the plan.

For industrial logging companies the situation is totally different, as can be identified in the two existing concession models: "ventes de coupe" and UFAs (unité forestière d'aménagement). The former, defined as a logging area of a maximum size of 2500 hectares to be logged within three years maximum, requires no management plan at all. The latter are 15-year renewable concessions covering a surface area of up to 200,000 hectares, and in this case a management plan has to be submitted within the first three years. However, during this period the company has the right to already start logging - without any management plan at all - in order to secure financing for preparing the management plan! To make

things worse, not a single management plan has to date been approved by the administration, although the first concession allocations under the 1994 forest law date back to 1996.

Penalties for illegal activities show a similar pattern of inequality. For instance, illegal activities by logging companies can lead to different types of sanctions, such as fines, exclusion from future biddings, or suspension of operation. However, it has so far never happened that a valid logging title has been withdrawn from a company as a result of illegal activities. For the communities, the penalties are much more far-reaching, and any mistake or infraction committed will lead to the cancellation of the community forest.

The law thus appears to benefit industrial logging, in spite of the fact that community forests have a higher potential for sustainability than commercial logging. The promotion of community forests should hence be supported as a means to ensure social and ecological sustainability. The so-called "pre-emption right" could have helped to achieve this objective, because it would have given the communities priority in their access to forests against commercial logging. Yet the draft regulation which would have established this right to the benefit of the communities has not yet been signed.

In its study on the Cameroonian forest sector (October 1999), the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department points at the same direction when it states that "the international logging companies that dominate the sector continue to have a free hand in the development and use of the forest resources of Cameroon. Local communities were left out of the reform process despite the declared objective to include them in forest resource management." July 2001.

The trees beyond the forest

Cameroon, with a population of around 15 million and a territory of 475,440 sq km, has an estimated 22 million hectares of forests, 64% of which are tropical rainforests lying at the southern part of the country, while the remaining 36% are in the central and northern Savannah areas. Atlantic coastal forests grow in areas with relatively fertile soils and hold some of the greatest biodiversity found anywhere in Africa.

After the decline of the oil boom era, the government increased timber exports and estimates of deforestation situate Cameroon's rainforest loss

at around 130,000 hectares per year. Deforestation has been aggravated by megaprojects such as road construction, and the building of dams. Logging activities, carried out by both local and foreign companies, are focused on few species: Sapelli, Ayous, Iroko, Azobe, Tali, Moabi, Movingui and Ngollon, for export to Europe, Asia and the rest of the world.

Benoit Ndameu, from Friends of the Earth Cameroon, warns that there will be no primary forest left in Cameroon in ten years time if major changes are not introduced. He identifies illegal logging as the big problem, and denounces that the government does not enforce its own regulations: "Of the 100,000 hectares logged each year, at least 40% of them are illegally deforested. Logging companies regularly exceed their concessions and export as much as they can with no oversight from the authorities."

Benoit Ndameu demystifies the role of so-called "slash-and-burn" agriculture in deforestation, often targeted as a primary cause of forest loss by vested interests. He explains that in the east of the country, where the worst deforestation is taking place, there are only between one to three people per square kilometre - farmers who stay in the same place for many years. Logging companies, on the other hand, have five-year permits to exploit enormous areas - after which nothing is left - many of them financed by the World Bank.

Bolloré, Thanry, Pallisco and Rougier, from France, Wijma from the Netherlands, Alpicam/Grumcam from Italy and Sfil and Sotref from Belgium are the most active foreign logging companies operating in Cameroon.

A new actor is now entering the scene. The pharmaceutical industry is increasingly interested in the medicinal value of Cameroon's trees and Benoit Ndameu says that French laboratory Plantecam has identified the tree *Prunus africana* as useful for treating prostate cancer, and ongoing research investigates the potentiality of *Ancystrocladus korupensis* to treat AIDS.

Together with other local NGOs, Friends of the Earth (FoE) Cameroon is trying to expose logging companies' operations and the government's non-compliance with its own regulations. Their joint strategy with FoE France has succeeded in uncovering facts about illegal activities being carried out by French logging companies in Cameroon, financed by the French government's development agency.

Unlike profit-making companies, the people of the forest establish a multipurpose link with the trees: they provide them fruit, food, bush meat,

oil for cooking, and honey, as well as provide them with medicine. Pygmies even use the bark of the Moabi (*Baillonela toxisperma*) to make a camouflage potion for hunting. The trees also enshrine sacred values for forest peoples: the Bantu believe that local Bubinga trees contain the spirits of their ancestors. The spiritual connection of these people with this tree, which during centuries has allowed the conservation of an extremely slow-growing species such as this, is not taken into account by forest exploiters who see only its hard, red-coloured wood to make furniture in Europe and Asia. August 2001.

Social and environmental impacts of industrial forestry exploitation

In Cameroon, as in many other countries in the South, a process of deforestation is taking place directly and indirectly caused by intensive industrial logging. This process is generally promoted by political reforms and by loans from the European Union, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organisation for the construction of mega-projects such as highways or dams.

As a consequence of this "international development aid," illegal exploitation of wood and commercial hunting have rapidly been added to "legal" logging, using the new highways as an access to the forest. Experts foresee that some of the large mammals in Cameroon will shortly disappear if this hunting is not put to a stop. Nearly all types of mammals and reptiles are exhibited on the urban markets. Gorilla and elephant meat is sold at high prices in the best restaurants. Theoretically it is forbidden to hunt these species and sell the meat or other parts of gorillas and chimpanzees, but this prohibition is widely transgressed.

Industrial exploitation of forests has been the real priority of the structural adjustment programmes promoted by the World Bank. Based on the promotion of products for export (in which, wood ranks very highly) and on the decrease in export tariffs, these programmes have played an important role in the increase of wood exports. The results have been the expansion of poverty, the increased power of foreign industry and the lack of State control over resource exploitation. Corruption and illegality in forestry exploitation in Cameroon are widespread and scant control favours illegal activities in the forestry sector: illegal logging (outside boundaries, without authorisation, using sub-contracting, cutting trees of a

smaller diameter than permitted, disregard for local restrictions), false declarations (on the quantities of wood production, on the volume of wood in inventories), illegal recovery of wood that has been confiscated.

Although the production of wood has undergone major growth, tax income from activities in the sector has dropped. To carry out monitoring in the field, the officials often depend on trucks belonging to forestry companies to take them to their concessions, which obviously does not favour independence of controls.

In some villages, the inhabitants block wood transport because the companies are not fulfilling their promises to build and/or to improve local facilities. The law foresees that the forestry companies are obliged to organise a meeting with the local population before exploitation can start. During these meetings, forestry companies make promises to the population (construction of a health centre, repairs to a bridge, fitting out a foot-ball field). But very often these promises take a long time to materialise, they are only partially fulfilled or they are simply badly implemented.

Direct employment generated by forestry companies is very limited for the Baka "Pigmies," often employed for a few days by the company as prospectors to indicate the species of trees of commercial interest. In this way, they are unconsciously participating in the destruction of their own environment. Workers operating in the parks for stocking wood and in the sawmills are provided with very little or no protective clothing (gloves, helmet, masks against the dust). Very often the wood at the sawmills is treated with toxic products against parasites and fungus. Very often this treatment is done with pesticides with a lindane and pentachlorofenol base, that are prohibited in Europe and whose use is subject to very strict security measures. Workers operating with these products are not usually equipped with protective clothing or they are insufficiently informed on the risks of these toxic substances. The remains of these toxic insecticides and fungicides are simply thrown away after use. Although evident, the importance of water and soil pollution from these products has never been investigated.

Due to their strict dependency on primary forests, the "Pigmies" are the main victims of forestry exploitation in Cameroon. According to estimates, at the end of the nineties, approximately 3,400 Bakolas lived in the South West and 40,000 Bakas in the Equatorial forests in South and South East of Cameroon. In the Yokadouma-Moloundou region, the Bakas are even more numerous than the Bantu. As their territorial rights are not

recognised by the authorities, they cannot defend themselves against the present expansion of industrial logging in Eastern Cameroon.

Wood-related activities, developed both by national and foreign companies are centred on a few high quality wood species (*ayous*, *sapelli*, *azobé*, *tali*) that monopolise 60% of wood exports. Some tree species, such as the *moabi* and the *bubinga*, are frequently an important reference point in the forest (because of their great height), in addition to the traditional cultural uses that the villagers or the "Pigmies" attribute to these and other species of trees. The law prohibits logging of *maobis* in a radius of 5 km around the villages, but this is openly violated by the logging companies. The oldest *bubingas* play an important social role in village life: popular meetings and local assemblies are organised under these trees, where the problems of the villagers are discussed. The *moabis* produce a high quality oil, the only food oil produced in this forest region. The production of this oil provides greater benefits than wood logging. The bark of these trees is used to make many drugs to cure hernias, back-ache and other diseases.

Summing up, commercial logging in Cameroon (legal and illegal) is seriously affecting the ecosystem and therefore the peoples who live in the forests. Benefits to the local population are minor and even compliance with the promises made by the companies regarding improvements to local infrastructure depend on people getting mobilised. Employment generated is scant and dangerous. Those who benefit are obviously the forestry companies and the intermediaries between logging and European consumers. And this is called development. December 2001.

French companies' illegal practices in the forest

When described by European officials, the world seems to be divided in two different sets of governments. "Their" world appears to have taken on board environmental - and even social - concerns, while "corrupt" Southern governments continue destroying the environment. Such simplistic picture does not take into account that the causes of environmental destruction in the South are very frequently rooted in the North. The following example helps to better understand the issue.

According to a Friends of the Earth-France report, the Cameroon Ministry of Forests and Environment, has recently published the names of forestry

corporations guilty of infractions in 2001 against Cameroonian forestry regulations. Among the primary portion of these corporations are French forestry conglomerates that have been repeatedly condemned for their illegal dealings.

Three cases concern the Doumé Affiliated Forestry Company (SFID) of the French Rougier Group. The SFID was condemned for exporting assamela timber, protected under Cameroonian forestry rules, having neither requested nor obtained a permit to do so, as well as for the falsification of documentation of the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora treaty (CITES). As a result, a two-million CFA-Franc fine (amounting to merely 3049 Euros) has been levied. Evidently, little resulted from this first condemnation, and thus a new case was brought against the company addressing the same infraction with the same financial penalty, 2,000,000 CFA Francs. The SFID was condemned in a third case in 2001 for having exceeded their export quotas by 33% (an excess corresponding to a volume of 17,653 m3 of wood).

The French group Bolloré has been also found guilty of being involved in illegal activities. The SIBAF affiliate of the Bolloré conglomerate was fined four million CFA Francs (6098 Euros) and had its rights to export assamela wood suspended for also having falsified CITES declarations. The SIBAF had already received a fine in 2000 to the tune of 9147 Euros for faulty materialization of cutting boundaries. Another Bolloré affiliate, the Campo Forestry Company (HFC) was condemned for exceeding allowed cutting boundaries and hacking directly into protected areas. The amount of the penalty in this case has not yet been decided.

Incredibly enough, while the SIBAF and HFC conglomerates are regularly fined for their infractions against Cameroonian forestry legislation, they have enjoyed financial support from the French Development Agency to carry out "sustainable forest management plans" since 2001. Only the French financial support given to these corporations seems, in certain monetary provisions, to motivate these companies to develop forest management plans. As the Cameroonian law mentions that companies have to develop a management plan, Friends of the Earth-France holds that such costs must be entirely assumed by corporations. The French aid, in the Congo Basin forest sector, must be reoriented such that it will no longer serve French commercial interests, but rather real economic benefit for local populations while protecting dense humid tropical forest ecosystems and their extraordinarily rich biodiversity. March 2002.

Forestry Group Rougier accused in French Tribunal

On 22 March 2002, Master Council William Bourdon placed civil charges in the hands of Investigating Magistrates of Paris filed in the name of seven Cameroonian villagers condemning criminal destruction of property, forgery and the utilization of forgery, fraud, possession of stolen goods, and corruption of officials against both directors of the Doumé Affiliated Forestry Company (SFID) group and the Cameroonian Legal Society, as well as their mother corporation Rougier S.A.

These charges are the result of in-depth, on-site investigation by Friends of the Earth-France and SHERPA. The charges condemn what is essentially summarized as the illicit pillaging of forest resources to the detriment of Cameroonian populations, offenses which have motivated Friends of the Earth-France to form a private party in the suit.

For the villagers, these charges present the opportunity to see those responsible for the infractions committed identified and brought to justice, as well as the opportunity to be compensated for these offenses. They expect the French justice to guarantee an independent and impartial judge in this case. The local situation is corrupt as a result of the power of the forestry companies to deprive them of this fundamental right.

In the charges, the plaintiffs expect to advocate the fact that the Rougier S.A. Group, taking the clear overlapping and interdependence between the two entities into account, must be considered an accomplice to the acts committed by its affiliate SFID, as well as the associated French directors.

These charges against the Rougier S.A. group and its directors before French Tribunals constitute a first case for Friends of the Earth-France and SHERPA, and make clear the fact that an extraterritorial act on the part of private entities does not systematically guarantee impunity to these entities. Friends of the Earth-France and SHERPA, in cooperation with foreign associations, will continue their partnership through a network of foreign legal advocates to, upon the realization of a feasibility study, envision further initiatives both in France and elsewhere. By: Frédéric Castell. April 2002.

CHAD - CAMEROON

Menacing oil exploitation

An international consortium consisting of Exxon, Shell and ELF is planning a multi-billion dollar oil exploitation project that will involve territories of Chad and Cameroon. It is feared that the project brings with it very serious environmental and social risks that may create another Ogoniland, Nigeria's oil-producing region marked by environmental devastation and brutal Human Rights violations. The project plans the development of the Doba oil-fields in southern Chad, and a 600 mile pipeline through Cameroon to transport oil to an Atlantic port for its export. Public funding from international development agencies - mainly the World Bank - is needed to realize the project. The WB intends to fund it both with International Development Association (IDA) credits - supposed to help the poorest countries - and through the International Finance Corporation, that supports private sector companies directly.

The WB claims that the project will alleviate poverty because revenue from the oil for the Government of Chad and royalties for that of Cameroon for the use of the pipeline would be invested in poverty programmes. However, this strategy has clearly little credibility, since both governments have shown a complete lack of commitment to poverty alleviation and besides are known for their lack of transparency in their financial transactions. So the allocation of aid dollars for these kinds of projects actually diverts scarce resources away from investments for social welfare.

From the environmental point of view perspectives are also negative. The projected pipeline will pass through ecologically fragile rainforest areas, including one that is the home of a Pigmy minority of traditional hunters and gatherers. Deforestation, wildlife poaching and the loss of farmland of local villagers, together with the danger of groundwater contamination and pollution of river systems through the expected leaking of oil from the pipeline itself, are points of grave concern. July 1997.

The oil pipeline: response from the World Bank

On June 10 1998, the WRM Secretariat addressed a letter to the president of the World Bank, expressing our concern over the arrest of Ngarlegy Yorongar and two journalists in relation with a declaration by the former opposing the construction of the oil pipeline Chad-Cameroon, which is being financed by the World Bank.

The World Bank's country director for Chad, Mr Serge Michailof, responded on June 22, expressing that he believed that the three had been released. On the general situation he added:

"As I am sure you are aware, we are supporting the Chad-Cameroon petroleum pipeline project because of its potential to substantially increase spending in Chad, one of the poorest countries in the world, on poverty alleviation activities. Let me assure you that notwithstanding the project's potential to reduce poverty, we will only proceed if our environmental and social safeguards have been respected, included meaningful consultation with local populations in Chad on the impacts of the project". August 1998.

The World Bank again shows who it serves

Facing strong opposition from civil society representatives, the World Bank recently approved a controversial oil and pipeline project led by Exxon-Mobil, that will link oil fields in Chad to Cameroon's Atlantic coast. The project sponsors also include Chevron and Petronas, the Malaysian state company. The total cost of the megaproject will reach US\$ 3.7 billion and it will be one of the largest of its kind ever undertaken in sub-Saharan Africa.

Even though the Bank argues that the project includes a programme to direct new revenues to support socioeconomic development in Chad and that environmental and social impacts of the project will be especially considered and periodically monitored, environmental and human rights groups emphasise that this megaproject will forcibly displace villagers along the 673-mile length of the pipeline as well as the Chadian villagers living near where the 300 oil wells are to be located, harm forest wildlife in the affected areas and contribute to further corruption at the government level in both countries. An added problem of the project is that it might spark the renewal of armed conflict in the oil-producing region and lead to severe human rights violations. The claim for a two-year moratorium to the project in order for Chad to develop a proper legal framework to handle the revenues and for Cameroon to establish environmental safeguards was ignored.

Taking into account the negative social and environmental performance of the actors involved in the project, as well as the proven effects of this kind of megaprojects undertaken in the South in the name of "progress", the

idea enthusiastically expressed by the Bank, according to which the project is "an unprecedented framework to transform oil wealth into direct benefits to the poor, the vulnerable and the environment" is really difficult to believe. Unless the Bank considers oil companies to be poor and vulnerable and that oil exploitation and transport can in some way benefit the environment. In sum, the Bank has unfortunately once again shown who it serves. June 2000.

Oil revenues versus human rights and environment

"This is the world's most scrutinized and controlled project," retorted a senior French official in Chad to representatives of Chadian human rights organizations who went to see him in March 2001. "There is absolutely nothing to worry about", he added. However, many people are very worried and have been fighting against the project for a very long time.

Indeed, the international campaign on the Chad/Cameroon Oil and Pipeline project which was spearheaded by African NGOs and supported by NGOs throughout the world, has been very successful in terms of getting the project to include numerous pre-cautionary measures designed to make the project environmentally and socially more responsible. For example, the pipeline was re-routed to avoid some of the biodiversity-rich areas, an Oversight Committee which includes civil society representatives was established in Chad to ensure that the oil revenues be used for poverty alleviation and, overall the role of civil society, local communities and indigenous peoples has been highlighted in the official documents. Furthermore, an International Advisory Group has been established whose task is to monitor the environmental and social impacts of the project as well as "governance" issues, which include human rights. At least on paper, all these measures indicate a serious departure from the previous laissez-faire approach in which the World Bank and the private companies it supports would leave it to recipient governments, no matter how corrupt, to manage the projects according to their own interests.

Despite these impressive changes on paper, there are serious doubts about what all these measures amount to in practice, since they cannot be considered in isolation from the countries' overall political situation. The most recent U.S. State Department's Reports on Human Rights confirm that both governments continue to commit serious human rights abuses

with impunity and that citizens do not have access to an independent judicial system.

Chadian and Cameroonian NGOs demanded a moratorium on the funding decision until proven safeguards were in place to ensure that the project would not lead to further human rights violations and environmental destruction. However the governments, the oil companies and their international financial backers were in a hurry and the project was approved in June 2000.

The fears of the NGOs were soon thereafter confirmed when the Chadian government used a part of its first payment from the oil companies for weapons purchases. Despite World Bank claims that the Oversight Committee is working, no regulations concerning its functioning have been published. In addition, the government's draft implementation decree proposes a decision-making process based on a simple majority system which would assure that the government would always have the majority. Furthermore it severely reduces the area of intervention for the Oversight Committee and requires that it only report to the government.

Construction of the pipeline of Cameroon will destroy biodiversity, especially in the littoral rainforest which is inhabited by the indigenous Bakola people. As required by World Bank environmental policies, the World Bank requested that the Government create a protected area to compensate for the loss of biodiversity. However, the off-set area, the Campo Reserve, is now being threatened by a French logging company which is part of the well-known Bolloré Group which has close connections to the Cameroonian government.

The International Advisory Group, which is headed by a former Senegalese Prime-Minister, is about to make its first field visit to Chad and Cameroon. The effectiveness of the group will depend on its ability to cut through the public relations efforts that are likely to surround its visit and establish independent relationships with the affected communities and the NGOs on-the-ground.

Independently of the IAG's work, the World Bank's Inspection Panel has just registered a claim presented by a Chadian member of parliament who represents the oil-producing region and 120 local residents. The claim states that local people and their environment have or are likely to suffer as a result of the World Bank violating its own policies. It is only after World Bank management has had a chance to respond to the allegations that the World Bank Board of Executive Directors will decide whether the

Inspection Panel should be allowed to investigate the claim or not. Given the controversial nature of the project and climate of political oppression in both Chad and Cameroon, the World Bank's credibility would be seriously damaged if it should fail to get to the bottom of the allegations made by the claimants who are risking jail, torture and assassination for speaking up.

Perhaps the most positive outcome of the international campaign on the project so far has been the strengthening of civil society organizations in Chad and Cameroon. Despite enormous difficulties and danger, there are plans for a coordinated NGO-effort to monitor the oil fields and pipeline construction with the goal of preventing a humanitarian and ecological disaster. These efforts deserve the international community's full support. By: Korinna Horta. April 2001.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Transnational loggers in the forest

Compared to other countries in the Congo region, the Central African Republic (CAR) has a relatively small area of forest - around five million hectares - corresponding to 8% of the country's territory. Yet in terms of commercially valuable species such as Sapelli (*Entandrophragma cylindricum*), Ayous (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*) and Sipo (*Entandrophragma utile*), its forests are some of the richest in Africa.

The country's forests grow in two distinct areas:

- 1) In the south-west, where forests cover an area of 3.7 million hectares. Most logging concessions are located in this area, especially along the borders with Cameroon and Congo.
- 2) In the east, where forests cover some 1.2 million hectares. These forests have been spared from logging due to the isolation of the region and the associated transport difficulties.

French companies and capitals dominate the forestry sector, where almost 3.2 million hectares have been granted under concession to 3 strictly French companies (4 concessions), 1 French-CAR, 1 Malaysian-French (2 concessions), 1 Syrian-CAR, 2 Lebanese and 2 CAR. In total, French capitals are involved in the exploitation of almost half of the forests under concession. The recent arrival of WTK of Malaysia has marked a

change in the pattern of European dominance, although SESAM, the company WTK acquired in the late 1990s, retains some French capital.

Total log production has increased significantly during the 1990s and is set to continue rising in line with structural adjustment policies. In 1993, total log production was 167,700 cubic metres and in 1999 it reached 552,800 cubic metres. In spite of government efforts to ensure that logs are mainly processed in the country, the majority of exports still consist of logs rather than processed timber and the gap is increasing: in 1993, raw log exports represented 56% of total wood exports and this percentage had risen to 71% in 1999.

Forestry activities are resulting in direct and indirect impacts on forests and forest peoples. Because of transportation difficulties and substantial costs, logging is highly selective and only the most valuable species are cut. But this selective logging leads to large areas of forest being opened up as companies go deeper into the forest in search of the best timber. Sapelli, Ayous and Sipo are the main species logged, but because of the damage caused to surrounding trees, some estimates suggest that selective logging in fact damages as much as 30% of the forest in CAR.

Once loggers leave the area, poachers and settlers come in on the roads built by logging companies, causing further damage to the forest. It is interesting to note that in the 1980s the French government - via the African Development Bank - funded the construction of a road in the south-western part of the country, which facilitated the entry of logging companies into the forest. It is also interesting to highlight that most roads built by loggers in the western area of the country have been aimed at serving their interests rather than those of the local people. Roads between CAR and Cameroon, for example, run near concessions held by French company Thanry in both countries.

It is clear that logging is benefiting the logging companies, that export most of the production to the European market where they are able to sell them at high prices. However, logging has certainly not contributed to higher living standards for the local population. In spite of wood and diamond exports, the Central African Republic remains one of the poorest countries in the region and its 3.4 million people have an average life expectancy of only 49 years. July 2001.

IMF, logging and mining

The dense, moist forests of the Central African Republic cover about four million hectares. Although the country has maintained loan arrangements with the IMF dating back to the 1980's, it came under increased pressure when the Central African Republic signed a three-year, US\$ 66 million loan agreement with the IMF in 1998. The IMF has encouraged the Central African Republic to increase exploitation of forest and mineral resources. "Mineral resources in the Central African Republic have so far been insufficiently exploited..." reads a policy framework paper jointly drafted by the IMF, World Bank, and Central African Republic in 1998.

The Central African Republic has followed the IMF's advice, and between 1993 and 1999, total log production increased three-fold. About half of the humid forest area is now held by a handful of transnational logging companies. Despite government efforts to ensure that wood exports have been processed to capture the jobs that come from value-added products, raw log exports have increasingly dominated the sector, making up 71 percent of wood exports in 1999.

Logging in the Central African Republic tends to be of a selective nature. While the lack of clearcut logging operations may appear to mean that forestry's impact is lessened, the effect has been that logging companies penetrate deeper into the forest in search of the most valuable species, most notably sapelli, ayous, and sipo trees.

Once logging activities have been concluded, additional damage is done as settlers and poachers (of "bushmeat" and ivory) gain access to new areas via the logging roads. This has resulted in tragic consequences for the Central African Republic's populations of gorillas, elephants, and rhinos:

- Survival of two species of endangered gorilla - the western and lowland gorillas - is threatened by continued human encroachment and illegal poaching.
- Expansion of commercial logging, human inhabitation, and trade in ivory have led to a decrease in habitat available for forest elephants, which migrate between the Central African Republic, Cameroon, and the Congo. It has been estimated that in the Central African Republic and Congo, as many as 200 elephants are killed each year.
- The western black rhino, one of the world's most imperiled species with perhaps fewer than 10 animals surviving, has already been eliminated from the Central African Republic altogether, due to excessive poaching.

New mining codes were also adopted by the Central African Republic in 2000, as directed by the IMF. In 2001, the nation adopted a new finance law that provided for the reduction of duties on the export of minerals. It is anticipated that these measures will cause additional harm to the country's natural areas. By: Jason Tockman. January 2002.

Logging companies destroy "Pygmies" livelihoods

The rainforests of the Central African Republic's Dzanga Sangha national park are inhabited by the Ba'Aka indigenous people, which counts with some 20,000 members. Like many other so-called "Pygmy" groups of neighbouring countries, they have been hunter-gatherers living in the heart of the forest and have developed a whole body of knowledge on the local rainforest resources.

Until logging companies came, they had somehow resisted harassment of their home and livelihood by other Central Africans. But now the scale of the predatory activities are threatening their centuries-old way of life. The Bayanga Wood Company carries out logging of selected trees, but to reach those trees a network of roads is built, which not only destroy forest land but also open up the forest to outsiders, mainly immigrants from Congo and Cameroon seeking employment at the company. Poverty and unemployment drive many newcomers to poaching, supplying nearby bush meat markets with gorilla, elephant, gazelle and antelope.

Forest outsiders generally hunt with guns, which makes a difference with the traditional hunting practices of the Ba'Aka, who are also honey collectors and edible vegetable gatherers. The western-biased approach to forest conservation usually disregards the knowledge behind traditional wildlife hunting. The words of Jean Yamindou, of the World Wide Fund for Nature, reflect that: "These people aren't used to cultivating things. For centuries they've been used to getting up in the morning and killing an animal for that day's requirements". So, they are "teaching" the Ba'Aka and Bantu people to breed fish and poultry, in order to prevent the further killing of the animals.

Traditional hunting is now considered "poaching" and poaching is forbidden along the board. That implies that the Ba'Aka can no longer hunt elephants, which they used to kill to eat. Anyhow, they have welcomed that regulation since at least it means a decrease in poaching by outsiders. But their life is being changed - and everything indicates that

not for the good. Loan opportunists leading to debt, traders, Western missionaries, alcohol, discotheques entering all of a sudden may disturb and distort any society. In the case of the Ba'Aka, they are even condemned by their culture: "The missionaries have told them their traditional music is tantamount to worshipping the devil", says a Bayanga resident. "Some of the young Ba'Aka don't know how to collect honey... Some listen to pop music and drink alcohol. Not all change is for the better", he adds.

But while "poaching" is forbidden, industrial logging is not. Logging companies constitute a major threat for forest conservation. Not only do they bulldoze the green frontier destroying fragile ecosystems, but also construct roads which leave the forest exposed and open to outsiders for commercial hunting. Shouldn't missionaries and conservationists "teach" logging companies a different way of reaping money? June 2002.

CONGO DR

The uncertain fate of forests

Rainforests in the centre and northern regions of Congo Democratic Republic (ex-Zaire) occupy more than half of the country's total area of 2,345,409 square kilometres and represent 82.5% of the original forest cover. About 47% of the whole dense tropical forests of Africa and 6% of the Planet's forests are in Congo DR. The long distances between the forests and commercial harbours, as well as the political crisis and the armed conflict between domestic groups and with neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi during the decade of 1990 caused that most of the country's forests remained untouched, which constitutes a difference with respect to other countries of the region. However, logging concessions are now threatening those forests.

SIFORZAL - subsidiary to the German Danzer Group - has been granted an area of 2.6 million hectares. Since 1996, several Malaysian timber companies are also exploiting vast areas: Idris Hydraulic Bhd. has got timber concessions totalling 1.25 million hectares in Congo DR and Gabon, while in 1997 Innovest Bhd announced it was buying two timber concessions for 707,000 hectares. Additionally, China is promoting logging in Congo DR to supply its huge internal market, which has increased its external demand due to an internal logging ban. Conserve at home and cut abroad seems to be the motto.

Even though being very rich in minerals and forests, Congo DR is among the poorest countries in the world according to its social indicators. The government has seemingly reacted to defend the vast area of remaining forests, and in April 1999 log exports were banned for three months. Foreign companies immediately claimed that this would be "the end of the forestry sector in the country" and soon logs were again being exported.

The question is if the government will submit to foreign interests - and give indiscriminate logging the green light - or if it will try to use forests sustainably and equitably for the benefit of present and future generations. Given the critical economic situation prevailing in the country, much will depend on support from all those governments which in international fora appear to be gravely concerned over the fate of the forests ... among which Germany, Malaysia and China, whose companies are now eager to begin the destruction of the forests of Congo. May 2000.

The case of the Twa of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park

A book written by Albert Kwokwo Barume recently published by the Forest Peoples Programme and IWGIA - "Heading Towards Extinction? Indigenous Rights in Africa: The Case of the Twa of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo" - examines the fate of the Twa indigenous people in that country.

The author, a Congolese human rights lawyer, uses an indigenous rights framework to examine the case of the Twa indigenous "Pygmy" people located in the eastern region of the country, who were expelled from their traditional lands in order to create the Kahuzi-Biega National Park. The Twa, a hunting and gathering people of the tropical forests, face a dismal future. Denied access to the lands that they have depended on for millennia, they now live in miserable squatter camps on the margins of other villages in the area surrounding the Park. Deprived of rights, compensation or justice, and exposed to discrimination from other sectors of society, the Twa are also suffering an alarming rise in malnutrition and disease.

The wider context of African policies regarding ethnic identity and the rights of indigenous peoples are also examined. The report situates the Twa within two important new areas of thinking: the growing movement of self-identified 'indigenous peoples' in Africa, who are invoking emerging concepts of international law to renegotiate their relationship with the

states that encompass them; and new models of conservation which recognise the rights of indigenous peoples, value their knowledge and seek to give them a central role in the management of conservation zones.

The Twa of Kahuzi-Biega have yet to benefit from either of these changes in thinking and this report therefore discusses land rights and possible options for the Twa to challenge their expulsion from the Kahuzi-Biega National Park and negotiate new arrangements based on the recognition of their rights. The report ends with concrete recommendations for reforms in the way the Congolese authorities, conservationists, and the aid agencies supporting them, are dealing with the Twa.

The contradiction between nature conservation and indigenous peoples rights is false. So the report does not seek to undermine the efforts of Congolese and expatriate conservationists who have struggled to protect the country's wildlife in war-torn eastern Congo. However, the need to respect the rights of peoples who have been and are being abused, is self-evident. The author asserts that conservation will be strengthened and not weakened when local communities experience it as a positive project for their own benefit. February 2001.

Pillage certified in Uganda?

A UN mission has recently presented its report on the widespread exploitation of mining and forest resources in Congo (ex-Zaire) by forces of Rwanda and Uganda, in collaboration with Congolese opposition groups in the Eastern region of the country.

Among the different issues analysed in detail in the report, there is a special case study on the Ugandan-Thai forestry firm DARA Forest, which started to operate in the Ituri area in 1998. The company immediately requested a forest concession to the Congolese authorities, which was refused by the Kinshasa government. In spite of that, the company began its activities by buying wood to local loggers and that same year set up a sawmill at Mangina. By the year 2000 it already had a forest concession granted by the armed opposition group Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Mouvement de Libération (RCD-ML).

Between 1998 and 2000, deforestation increased - particularly in Djugu, Mambassa, Beni, Komanda, Luna, Mont Moyo and Aboro - as a result of large-scale unsustainable logging related to DARA Forest's activities.

Wood extracted from that region - occupied by the Ugandan army and the RCD-ML - is transported to Uganda both for local use and for export. Given that the wood extracted from Congo pays no taxes at all, acajou wood from that country is much cheaper in Uganda than the same wood cut locally. Logs from Congo are later exported to Kenya, where important volumes are re-exported to countries in Asia, Europe and North America. The companies that purchase the undocumented DARA wood are mainly based in Belgium, China, Denmark, United States, Japan, Kenya and Switzerland.

In order to try to "legalize" its operations, DARA Forest signed a contract in May 2000 with SmartWood and the Rogue Institute for Ecology and Economy from Oregon, United States, aimed at obtaining certification for its wood. The plot consisted in certifying the Budongo forest in Uganda - for which DARA didn't even have a concession at the time - and to use that certification to market the wood extracted illegally and unsustainably from Congo.

According to its own internal documentation, DARA Forest would then import logs from Congo, which would be processed at Namanve in Uganda together with the wood extracted from the certified forest in Uganda. In this way, its entire production would be marketed as FSC-certified wood. DARA's partners in this operation would be: DARA Europe GmbH from Germany, Shanton President Wood Supply Co. Ltd. from China, President Wood Supply Co. Ltd. of Thailand and DARA Tropical Hardwood, Portland (Oregon) from the USA. A neat operation which, after the UN mission report, will hopefully fail. May 2001.

Will Zimbabwe become a member of the logging club?

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has nearly half of Africa's, and 6% of the world's, tropical rainforest and the area has been recently designated one of the most important forests on the planet by the United Nations.

Until recently, poor communications and the continuing conflict had largely spared much of the country from the attention of commercial tropical timber firms. But now a Zimbabwean company has gained rights to exploit 33 million hectares of forests in DRC, 15% of its total land area and ten times the size of Switzerland. Allegedly this has been the result of a deal between the DRC's government and representatives of Zimbabwean

president Robert Mugabe in return for military aid against rebels in the east of the country and in a desperate attempt to recoup some of the losses Zimbabwean leaders have incurred in their intervention in DRC.

The logging concession has been granted to Socebo, a subsidiary of Cosleg (Pvt) Ltd. Cosleg is itself a joint venture between the ironically named Operation Sovereign Legitimacy (Osleg), a company largely controlled by the Zimbabwean military, and Comiex-Congo, a firm largely owned by the family of DRC President Joseph Kabila. The operation is expected to bring in profits of up to US\$ 300 million over the two to three years it will take to clear the concessions of the most valuable timber.

The intention is to log four concessions, located in Katanga, Kasai, Bandundu and Bas-Congo Provinces, from each of which Socebo hopes to produce over 150,000 cubic metres of timber per year at full capacity. All the concessions were scheduled to be opened by 30th April 2001 but, as far as we are aware, the starting dates have not been met. The reason for this delay appears to be that the company has been unable to raise the necessary funds - estimated at approximately US\$30-40 million per concession - of which more than half would be borrowed from financial markets.

The timber would be exported - as Zimbabwe is self sufficient - although some could be used for domestic consumption in DRC. At this stage it is not clear exactly where logs will be exported to, but it is likely that timber from the Katanga concession would be exported by rail through Zambia and eventually from Durban (South Africa) to countries outside the region. The other concessions are further north and, due to poor road conditions, it is likely the timber would be transported by river. Currently 80% of logs exported from DRC transit Congo-Brazzaville and are destined for the European market. Judging by regional trends France would almost certainly be a major importer (as it is from Cameroon, Gabon and Liberia).

Timber in DRC has been exploited for over 60 years by what has effectively become a cartel, which includes French, Belgian and some German interests. Unless a company is a member of this cartel, it is considered that operating timber concessions would be extremely difficult if not impossible. Will Zimbabwe become a new member of this destructive and exclusive "club"? September 2001.

Millions of acres of forest under unsustainable logging

Located in the heart of the African continent, the Democratic Republic of Congo's 2.3 million square kilometres territory covers most of the Congo River basin and has a narrow outlet into the Atlantic. The center and northern regions are covered with rainforests (1.1 million square kilometres in 1993) which, although sparsely populated, are the major livelihood for many of the country's 48 million people who depend on the forests for non-timber forest products such as food, building materials and medicines.

Though Congo DR is a country rich in natural resources, landlessness, competition for land and a long history of conflict have led a great proportion of its population to poverty, hunger, chronic malnutrition and indebtedness.

Logging companies operate without an institutional or legislative framework to ensure sustainable and equitable use. Most timber exports are of logs, though in April 1999 there was a brief ban which was lifted three months later on account of pressure from the forestry sector. The World Bank also contributed to increase timber exports with US\$ 12 million given for that purpose with the aim of paying the country's debt.

The extremely low yield of logging operations resulting from a highly selective cut where only the best trees are taken, just accelerates the pace at which rainforests are being opened up.

Although there are several protected areas, the war has prevented management and monitoring of those within conflictive zones. But also those outside the war zone are not being properly monitored.

In social terms, on the one hand logging companies provide a certain level of health, education and transportation services to local people usually neglected by the State, but on the other hand, they pay very low wages and feel no responsibility for Congolese workers once they have finished logging and moved away. This means that those who have moved into the forest to work for the company often have to switch to clearing the forest to grow food in order to feed their families. They - and not the companies or the government - are then blamed for destroying the forest, while those responsible for the social, economic and environmental destruction triggered off by unsustainable logging cash their profits and leave. The victims thus become victims twice, while the forests continue to disappear. November 2001.

Forests Open for Business

The Democratic Republic of Congo contains over 50 percent of Africa's remaining tropical forests. Only Brazil and Indonesia have larger areas of tropical rainforest. Although natural resource exploitation did not cease during the war, many foreign logging operations halted their activities. The Malaysian company Innovest, for example, has sold assets in DRC due to financial losses incurred. On January 18, 2002 Innovest announced that they had entered into an agreement with Man Fai Tai Congo Ltd S.A.R.L to sell machines and equipment that were purchased in 1997 for the logging concessions in DRC and the Republic of Congo.

The main species exported from DRC in 1998 were Sipo, Sapelli, Tola, Iroko, Afrormosia, Tima and Wenge. The main importing countries were Portugal, Germany and France. The export of timber is now more difficult to estimate and track, in part because much of the wood leaves the country via Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, or other neighbouring countries.

The resumption of more organised logging activities will be linked to the return of a measure of political and economic stability. Efforts have been made to facilitate a peace process in the region, and there is now increased calm in the country. There are, however, still sporadic outbreaks of violence. The challenge remains to find enduring political solutions. In April 2002, the inter-Congolese dialogue was adjourned inconclusively after 52 days of peace negotiations in Sun City in South Africa. At the Sun City talks, there was agreement among the Kinshasa government of Joseph Kabila, the Uganda-backed MLC and the majority of civil society groups and unarmed political opposition groups on a peace agreement that would see Joseph Kabila retain his post during a transition period, the creation of several new institutions, and the inclusion of RCD and MLC in the government and institutions such as the army. The Rwanda backed RCD-Goma rejected the agreement outright. Those party to the agreement have announced that they will install a transitional government in Kinshasa in mid-June.

In light of recent efforts to find enduring political solutions, foreign investors are re-gaining their confidence, and are returning to invest in the timber industry in DRC. Joseph Kabila has actively engaged with international financial institutions, and an IMF manager stated that there were good prospects for intensifying cooperation between the IMF and DRC. Kabila and the World Bank are supporting an economic strategy

that rests to a very large degree on the extraction of the rich natural resources that exist in this enormous country. Kabila has been making the rounds; in October of last year he and his economic minister travelled to, amongst other places, New York, Paris and Brussels. In November of the same year, Kabila gave the keynote address to the US-Africa Business Summit. In his speech he outlined an ambitious economic strategy that would re-integrate DRC into the world economy. He pledged to strengthen the Congolese private sector and institute reforms that will increase economic stability. He also outlined preparations of a new investment and mining code.

Despite the civil war, and in some cases because of it, the extraction of natural resources continued unchecked. Global Witness and others have documented the links that exist between Zimbabwe's regime and the extraction of natural resources in DRC. The largest concessionaires in DRC are Socebo, a subsidiary of Cosleg. The concession covers 33 million hectares of land, more than 15 percent of DRC's total land area. Logging has already commenced in the Katanga province, carried out by the Zimbabwean military in cooperation with a company called SAB Congo.

Throughout the conflict there has been concern that natural resources, including timber, have been illegally harvested. In December of 2001, the Security Council received a report by a UN Expert Panel outlining ways of tackling illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In December, the Security Council agreed that a reconstituted expert panel should assemble in January 2002 for an additional six month period to examine in more detail the extraction and trade in natural resources. The interim report released in May 2002, found that the illegal exploitation of natural resources in DRC are being consolidated, and the effects on the local populations are disastrous. The panel has found that various strategies are being employed to divert money from the exploitation for personal gain, or to finance military operations. To date, however, the Security Council has failed to take any concrete actions to attempt to rectify the situation.

There is little doubt that there will be an increase in private investment and extraction of timber resources from DRC. In the climate of uncertainty, with sporadic outbreaks of violence, and political and economic instability, it is necessary to monitor logging operations carefully. Investors and loggers are anxious to gain their access to the rich forests of DRC. The

next couple of years will be critical for the forests and for people who depend on forest resources for their livelihood. June 2002.

CONGO R

Shell's eucalyptus plantations now provide even fewer jobs

Apart from its well-known oil operations, Shell company is also involved in a less known activity: tree plantations. The company has planted - on its own or in joint-ventures - almost 150,000 hectares of mostly eucalyptus and pine trees in Argentina (10,000), Chile (36,000), Republic of Congo (42,000), New Zealand (23,000), Paraguay (8,000) and Uruguay (28,000).

In the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Shell holds 90% of the shares of Eucalyptus du Congo (ECO-SA), while the government owns the remaining 10%. Its plantations are established on state-owned land near the coastal town and port of Pointe Noire. The plantations are composed of clones of Eucalyptus hybrids (*Eucalyptus alba* x *Eucalyptus urophylla* and *Eucalyptus tereticornis* x *Eucalyptus grandis*). The main market for these clonal plantations is the pulp industry and nearly half a million cubic metres of raw logs are exported each year to Norway, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Morocco for the production of pulp and paper.

As usual in this type of plantations, job creation by this company is poor: a mere 400 jobs. This means that - counting only the planted and not the entire area covered by the plantation - it requires 105 hectares to create just one job. But things have now got even worse. Last month, the company's administration decided to stop cutting and selling eucalyptus wood because of a fall in the international price, allegedly due to overproduction of this type of wood. As usual too, the cost will be borne by the workers. According to the company's manager Mr Perrin, the number of workers will decrease until "the price of wood returns to a correct level". In other words, "the market" will decide the fate of those workers.

This is one of the numerous examples regarding the unsuitability of the large-scale monoculture plantation model as a means for the improvement of local peoples livelihoods. In this case the company, with support and participation of government, has appropriated more than 50,000 hectares of land for an activity that produces very few jobs and generates very little export-incomes because it exports unprocessed logs. While the international price is high the company makes profits that do not

"trickle-down" to local workers and communities. When the price is low, workers are dismissed.

Additionally, this situation offers yet another example of the pulp and paper industry's strategy to ensure a cheap and constant supply of raw material: to promote large-scale plantation of eucalyptus in countries that can produce vast amounts of cheap wood. This implies that trees must grow fast, that labour and land must be cheap and that environmental controls must be lax. Those needs of the pulp and paper industry are certainly met by the Republic of Congo. But they are also met by many other countries, which are encouraged, through different mechanisms, to dedicate vast areas of their territories to tree plantations. The result is a worldwide competition to sell the same commodity, which lowers the price - to the benefit of the global industrial and trade actors. May 2001.

Foreign loggers deplete forests and livelihoods

The Republic of Congo, often referred to as Congo-Brazzaville, has a total area of 342,000 sq. km, 60% of which is covered by rainforests (21.5 million hectares), mainly located in the scarcely-populated north of the country. The forest and its resources are the main source of livelihood for most of the rural population living there.

As part of structural adjustment policies and under the macro-economic reform policies prescribed by multilateral lenders, privatisation of the former forest parastatal institutions is taking place and is increasing the penetration by transnational corporations in the forestry sector. Some of the foreign companies operating in the country are Danzer (German), Rougier (French), Feldmeyer (German), consortium Boplac (Dutch-Danish-German), Wonnemann (German). Timber exports - mostly raw logs rather than processed products - represent the country's second major source of export revenues after oil. The forestry sector provides 10% of formal employment and its contribution to GNP increased from 1% in 1982 to 5% in 1996.

Approximately half of the country's forests are classified as productive forest suitable for timber exploitation, mainly operated by multinational logging companies under concession. Low forestry taxes, weak monitoring and enforcement capacity, irregularities and corruption in the awarding and exploitation of generous concessions have allured

companies and boomed forestry operations. Main tree species targeted are Okoumé, Limba, Sapelli and Sipo.

Exploitation of the forests has facilitated commercial bushmeat hunting, which is decimating wildlife in a number of areas. The loss of biodiversity which results from logging has long-term consequences both ecologically and socially. Although the country has protected areas, the capacity to monitor them is minimal.

The practices of forestry companies have also had social impacts, including discrimination against local people who usually have not had access to an adequate education so they do not possess the skills required by the logging companies. Pygmies in particular, who are forest dwellers and use forests for their subsistence activities, are twofold negatively affected: their livelihood is being destroyed and they find it difficult to obtain reasonably remunerated employment because they are perceived as unreliable by logging companies.

Companies do not listen sufficiently to local people, whose needs are rarely taken into account or respected unless they take direct action, such as blocking the loggers' roads with barricades.

As usual, the sad story goes that profit led activities which benefit only a rich transnational elite with their local cronies disrupt the environment and the livelihoods of ancient dwellers and guardians of the forest. August 2001.

Increased logging activities

The Congo Basin contains the second largest area of tropical rainforest in the world after the Amazon Basin. Renowned for its high biodiversity, this forest is also home to culturally diverse peoples who depend on forest resources for their livelihoods. The Republic of Congo has recently emerged from a bitter civil war, during which timber exploitation was dramatically reduced, and as stability has increased in the region, exploitation of natural resources has also increased. Timber companies are eager to resume, or begin, exploitation of the resource-rich forests of Congo Brazzaville, and forestry operations in the south of the country have resumed, with the remote primary forests of the north, which were largely unallocated prior to the civil war, now also being allocated for timber exploitation.

Logging operations will increasingly disrupt the lives of local people, especially Pygmies, who depend on the forest for their livelihoods. As the north is being opened up to logging operations, the demand for bushmeat to supply workers' communities will increase and will contribute to the impoverishment of forest opened up by roads. This will have direct consequences for Pygmy groups who use forest areas for their subsistence activities.

An expansion of the timber industry is also facilitated by the policies pursued by the government to liberalise their economy. With the support of the IMF, Congo Brazzaville will liberalise its natural resource sector to maximise profits, and to those ends a new forestry law was introduced in 2000. Henri Djombo, the forestry minister, has estimated that the log production in Congo Brazzaville will double, or triple within the next two to three year period.

As a result of government policies to liberalise the economy, new allocations have been made and large scale logging operations are now underway in the northern regions of Sangha and Likouala. German owned Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB) is the largest forestry operator in the country (1.15 million hectares), but other companies are also moving in to secure their position in the profitable industry - particularly in the previously unexploited north regions. The following is a list of some of the most important companies involved in Northern Congo (March 2001), including each one's concession areas (in hectares):

Bois et Placages de Lopola (BPL):	199,900 ha
Congolaise Industrielle des bois (CIB):	1,150,516 ha
Cristal:	213,200 ha
ESBO:	163,466 ha
Industrie de Transformation des bois de Likouala (ITBL):	422,195 ha
Likouala Timber:	525,500 ha
Mokabi SA:	370,500 ha
Société Congolaise Arabe Libyenne (SOCALIB):	448,000 ha
Société Industrielle Forestière de Ouessou (IFO):	1,131,600 ha
Thanry-Congo:	461,295 ha

Companies are also investing in increased logging activities in the south. For example, the Portuguese company FORALAC recently reported an investment of eight billion F CFA (US\$ 11.4 million) and the creation of 500 jobs in its concessions.

As a result of the expansion of forestry activities, Congo-Brazzaville is emerging as an important supplier of tropical timber to Europe; and Germany, for example, has increased its imports of timber from this country. Species exported from Congo Brazzaville include Sapelli and Sipo. The commencement of logging in the north has also provided the impetus to build new roads linking with Cameroon and the Central African Republic, and all timber from the northern regions is exported via Douala in Cameroon, making it difficult to estimate exactly how much timber is being exported from Congo-Brazzaville.

At a meeting in Paris in March 2002, Henri Djombo, the Congolese forestry minister recognised that illegal logging was occurring in tropical Africa. He further stated that in order to fight illegal logging and introduce sustainable forest practises, democratisation must be encouraged, and funding must be made available to tackle the problem. He cited his country as an example of how lack of access to resources results in weak government control of the forestry sector. Djombo explained that the government of Congo Brazzaville only has 300 agents and foresters, when at least 2000 are required to do the job.

In conclusion, the situation is changing rapidly in Congo Brazzaville, and export of timber is up from the low caused by the civil war. The government is actively pursuing an export oriented economic strategy, and aim to double, or even triple log production. At the same time as concessions are being granted and companies are starting their operations, the Minister responsible for the forests has recognised that illegal logging is taking place, and that the government are lacking human resources to effectively oversee the industry. April 2002.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

World Bank promotes oil palm and rubber plantations in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire

By different means the World Bank is one of the major and most influential promoters of the prevailing monoculture tree plantation model. The

International Finance Corporation (IFC) - a part of the World Bank Group, whose specific task is the promotion of private sector investment in "poor" countries - has been directly investing in projects linked to tree plantations, for example in Kenya and Brazil.

The IFC has recently signed two agreements to fund two of these initiatives in West Africa. One of them consists of the reopening of a rubber company in Liberia that was shut down during the civil war, while the other is the set up of an oil palm plantation in Côte d'Ivoire.

The Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) will receive a loan of US\$ 3.5 million to develop a rubber plantation in its 120,000 hectares estate. Between 1961 and 1984 the company had planted rubber there in an area of 10,500 hectares, which was abandoned because of the civil war. According to its promoters, the project will create jobs, provide health and education, and improve rural infrastructure, benefiting 800 small holders.

The holding company of Côte d'Ivoire's leading producer of rubber – Société des Caoutchoucs de Grand Bereby (SOGB)- will receive a US\$ 6 million IFC loan to establish an oil palm plantation in that country. The plantation will occupy 5,000 hectares and in a second phase of the project the company will build a crude palm oil factory to process its production. It has been underscored that the new plantations will avoid areas of secondary rainforest, which SOGB has guaranteed to protect. SOGB already operates a 15,000 hectare rubber plantation and processes rubber, mainly for export.

The globalization of the plantation model is a reality, also regarding rubber and oil palm production. The Compagnie Internationale de Cultures (Intercultures), an affiliate of Societe Financiere des Caoutchoucs (SOCFINAL S.A.), owns 75% of the Liberian Agricultural Company. SOCFINAL is a Luxembourg holding company with agricultural, real estate, banking, and financial interests, and major holdings in oil palm and rubber not only in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, but also in Indonesia, Malaysia, Cameroon and Nigeria. In the rubber production project in Liberia also participates PROPARCO, the private sector lending arm of the French development agency Agence Francaise de Developpement. At the same time both Intercultures and PROPARCO are shareholders in SOGB.

Mr. Tei Mante, Director of IFC's Agribusiness Department, said that both agreements would lead to more employment and higher living standards, that they will promote exports that will earn foreign currency, while

supporting agricultural production with maximum sensitivity to the environment. Everything sounds incredibly nice ... but the problem is that reality shows a completely different situation. Promises of a higher quality of life for local dwellers, an improvement of poor countries' economies, the respect for the environment, etc. are in blatant contradiction with the negative consequences on people and the environment that similar projects based on vast tree monocultures bring about with them. The few and poor quality jobs that such projects create seldom improve local peoples' quality of life and the environmental impacts that large-scale tree monocultures entail result in further impoverishment of local populations. If the World Bank is really willing to fulfil its mandate of poverty alleviation, then it should begin to reorient its loans to investments which create better employment opportunities than those generated by this type of plantations. December 1999.

Increasing conflict between smallholders and oil palm estates

In March this year, planters at Cote d'Ivoire's Ehania agro-industrial oil palm plantation unit embarked on an "unlimited strike action" to press for an increase in the price of palm oil. The strike paralysed the activities of three factories that collect and transform palm oil. The Ehania planters, grouped in an agricultural cooperative called Palm-Ehania, were protesting against a drop in the purchase price of their produce, which had since January 2001 fallen from 23 to 19.07 CFA francs (1 dollar = 700 CFA francs). The cooperative's vice president Ahissi Brou, said "the drop in price may force growers to abandon the plantations." He said they were determined to pursue their strike action until their demands were met, arguing that it was "inconceivable" that palm produce prices drop while those of finished products such as soap or table oil were constantly on the increase.

This is not the first strike of this kind and there have been similar actions taken by outgrowers since the 1997 privatization of the previously state-owned Palmindustrie company. The assets of that company were bought by three large private enterprises: 1) PALMCI (Blohorn-Unilever and SIFCA-Cosmivoire), which acquired two thirds of the production capacity of Palmindustrie, including 9 processing plants and 35,000 hectares of industrial plantations; 2) SIPEF-CI, that bought 2 processing plants and 12,700 hectares of industrial plantations and

3)PALMAFRIQUE, with 3 processing plants and 7,500 hectares of plantations.

The plantations of those three companies constitute however only a third of the plantation area in Cote d'Ivoire, where smallholders have a total of 135,000 hectares of oil palm plantations. This situation is the result of the Plan Palmier launched in 1963, which outlined a program for the establishment of state owned nucleus estates (plantations agroindustrielles) and land belonging to contracted smallholders (plantations villageoises). Funds provided by the World Bank and the European Development Fund played an important role in enabling the implementation of the plan. The state released forest reserves for the new plantations and created a land tenure system whereby anyone working the land could have title to it. By 1984 the estates, operated by the parastatal Palmindustrie, constituted 60.3% of the area devoted to oil palm production and 39.7% was constituted by contracted smallholders. The current situation has drastically changed, with companies holding 30% and smallholders 70% of the plantation area.

Although there are already some examples of small cooperative-operated processing mills, the major companies are the main buyers of the outgrowers' production, which - coupled with the international drop in palm oil prices - are now leading to situations such as the strike at Ehania. In this case, the company involved is PALMCI, whose assets in the area include 11,600 hectares of plantations and three oil processing plants which also process the harvest of some 22,000 hectares of smallholder plantations. The company has more assets throughout the country such as:

- at Toumanguié: a 2,900 hectare plantation and one processing plant, with smallholder plantations totalling 15,000 hectares
- at Irobo: a 5,300 hectare plantation and one processing plant, with smallholder plantations totalling 12,000 hectares
- at Boubo: a 4,400 hectare plantation and one processing plant, with smallholder plantations totalling 10,000 hectares
- at Blidouba: a 3,000 hectare plantation and one processing plant, with smallholder plantations totalling 10,000 hectares
- at Iboke: a 5,700 hectare plantation and one processing plant, with smallholder plantations totalling 10,000 hectares

- at Néka: a 2,700 hectare plantation and one processing plant, with smallholder plantations totalling 12,000 hectares.

Within this context, the Ehania strike can be seen as a symptom of the aspirations of those who now hold the largest part of the plantations vis a vis the three companies that hold the processing facilities and who establish the price for the raw material. Privatization has generated the scenario for this confrontation and the government is not even a neutral observer, being in this case a PALMCI shareholder. The future is difficult to predict, but the most plausible hypothesis appears to be that - unless palm oil prices increase in the international market - conflicts will be on the rise. And, given the widespread promotion of oil palm plantations throughout the tropics, palm oil prices are most unlikely to increase. June 2001.

IMF, cocoa, coffee, logging and mining

For over a decade, the Ivory Coast has been under the influence of IMF structural adjustment programs, of which intensification of exports has been a significant factor. The 1990s saw the heightened pursuit of fiscal and structural reform in the Ivory Coast. The Ivory Coast devalued their currency in 1994 and eliminated export taxes in compliance with the IMF's adjustment program and in 1995 the country liberalised its domestic markets.

As a result, cocoa production exploded by 44 percent from 1994 to 1996. The Ivory Coast became the world's leading producer of cocoa, with 40 percent of the global market. The country also ranks third in coffee production, behind only Brazil and Colombia. The flourishing of the agricultural sector, under its flagship crop of cocoa has, however, brought about substantial changes in land use. This land conversion has been a major factor in the decrease in the Ivory Coast's forest cover by 67 percent since its 1960 independence from France. Forests now total about six million acres, where they once covered 70 million acres, or most of the southern half of the country.

The lucrative cocoa market has spurred farmers to illegally expand their plots into the Ivory Coast's protected forests, threatening about one-third of these areas. Forested areas intended for protection through their official government designation of "sacred" and "classified" are being slashed, burned, and cultivated for export crops. In these forests, almost half a

million farmers and their families have grown up to 100,000 tons of cocoa, about ten percent of the 1996/1997 harvest.

In 1994, Europe-destined wood products accounted for 11 percent of exports. The logging activities continue to expose the more remote areas of the Ivory Coast to poachers. Where local residents have hunted wild animals for sustenance for thousands of years, today's "bushmeat" trade has evolved into a commercial industry where traditional tools have been supplanted by automatic rifles. The hunting of chimpanzees, birds, turtles and other species has grown into an estimated US\$ 121 million industry in the Ivory Coast.

The forests of the Ivory Coast remain some of the most significant forested areas throughout Africa. Their loss poses serious risks for regional climatic patterns, which are closely tied to the presence of forest cover. Ironically, the cocoa production is dependent upon these weather conditions and overproduction of cocoa could ultimately threaten the success of the crop.

The IMF has also recently pressured the Ivory Coast to expand its mining and petroleum sectors. By: Jason Tockman. January 2002.

The sacred forest, a community protected area

The village of Zaïpobly is located in Southeast Côte d'Ivoire, in the western outskirts of Taï National Park. This park covers an area of 454,000 hectares and is the largest remnant of the original humid tropical forest in West Africa. It was designated Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1978 and was inscribed on the Natural World Heritage List in 1982, because of its extraordinary specific wealth and because of the numerous endemic species inhabiting it. At the beginning of the last century it was a uniform forest zone, but agricultural systems of cultivation introduced later and over-exploitation of the forest have reduced it to the present small forest islets.

Most of these relict forests have survived because they are considered to be sacred. A sacred forest is a place that is venerated and reserved for the cultural expression of a community. Access and management are governed by traditional powers.

The sacred forest of Zaïpobly is located in the eastern hinterland of Taï National Park, it covers an area of 12.30 hectares and is unrestrictedly

accessible to all, however the flora and fauna are strictly protected. The forest is very much linked to life in the village of Zaïpobly, on the southern border of the forest. For village dwellers, the forest fulfils many functions: it serves as protection, provides them with medicinal plants and food and is a place for the conservation of flora and fauna. It creates a favourable damp microclimate for rural activities in the surrounding fallow lands, it is a place for important socio-cultural meetings and serves as a last living testimonial for future generations of what a true forest is.

The main actors within the village society involved in conserving the sacred forest are:

Kwi society, originally a jurisdictional and police institution, but lately more the latter, as a result of the disintegration of traditional structures, the introduction of new religions and changes in mentality; traditional authorities, depositories of knowledge; the grass-roots community, on which the success of the system depends.

The daily administration of the forest falls on the Kwi society; they also exert psychological dissuasion over the population. Traditional authorities are the prolongation of the founding ancestors and they are responsible for deciding on a site being considered as sacred. They are finally responsible for the sacred site and are its moral guarantee.

Impoverishment of society, progressive soil erosion, introduction of other ways of thinking and of production, and monotheist religions (Islamic and Christian) opposing the practice of traditional rites, judged to be diabolical, have contributed to weakening the sacred forests and therefore are factors threatening their existence, because the establishment and protection of sacred forests are mainly based on local cultural and religious beliefs.

It has been shown that traditional systems of African culture, far from constituting an obstacle to environmental protection, are the best guarantee in the protection of ecosystems and conservation of biodiversity. And this experience shows that sacred places can become real biodiversity reserves in the African continent. For this reason many Africans are conscious of the importance of safeguarding and re-valuing the communities' cultural knowledge, showing that Africa knows how to organise itself to care for what is precious.

At a time when globalisation is swallowing everything up and converting it into merchandise, it is timely to look at these examples, where biodiversity, the forest, is seen in a wider dimension than that of its mere

components. This makes it possible to establish a link and it would be healthy for each society to re-edit it, from the position of their history and culture. July 2002.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Logging ban and logging on the rise

For its size, Equatorial Guinea holds a remarkable biodiversity both in its continental zone - Mbini - and in its two main islands, Pigu and Bioko. Continental Equatorial Guinea is covered by dense tropical rainforest that is exploited by the lumbering industry. It contains more than 140 wood species, of which the most commercially important are okume (*Aucoumea klaineana*), African walnut, and various mahoganies. This has attracted the logging industry, which has been the main responsible for a severe process of deforestation particularly in the coastal regions of Mbini. Many of the country's inaccessible interior regions still remain mostly undisturbed, but deforestation close to the coast has led the Spanish - and more recently Asian - timber companies to venture deeper into the interior.

The country's main export-earnings come for oil, lumber, cacao and coffee. Until independence in 1968, the colonial economic model was based on cacao cultivation, which introduced a radical transformation to the country's landscape, particularly in Bioko. Oil was discovered off the north coast of Bioko in 1981, and production began in 1992. By the mid-1990s petroleum products accounted for over half of the country's export earnings. Coffee is grown mainly along the Cameroon border.

The island of Bioko, located in the Gulf of Guinea facing the coast of Cameroon, was a strategic and commercial centre for the Portuguese and Spanish conquerors during the 18th century. Descriptions from travellers and geographers who visited the island show their surprise and admiration for the rich flora and fauna that could be found there. More recent studies confirm the existence of high biodiversity and endemism levels in Bioko. Between 1991 and 1992 alone, more than one hundred new plant species were for the first time described by science. The presence of one endemic bird species, 46 endemic bird sub-species and ten species with a restricted distribution in the African continent have been registered.

The government of Equatorial Guinea has recently banned the cutting of trees in Bioko. According to the deputy minister of Water, Forests and Environment, Joaquin Mecheba Ivina, the measure aims at protecting the forests against the "abusive exploitation to which it is subjected by chain-saw operators." Logging companies were banned from Bioko in 1990 but they have since been replaced by small-scale sawmillers, whose activity is considered to be a threat to the forests.

However, no similar measures are being taken on the mainland. On the contrary, forest exploitation is on the rise. From 1993 to 1997 forest concessions have grown from 600,000 to 1,500,000 hectares, which means that all the country's commercially productive forest is now under concession. At the same time, there have been changes in the transnational actors involved and in the destination of exports. In 1993, most of the timber exports went to Japan, followed by Spain, Turkey and Portugal. Four years later, in 1997, 55% of wood exports went to China and 20% to Japan and only 5% to Spain.

The rapid growth of Equatorial Guinea's forestry sector is considered to be unsustainable and having devastating environmental impacts on water courses and coastal areas. According to an International Monetary Fund assessment, at the current rate of exploitation forest resources would be exhausted by the year 2012.

Within such context, the logging ban in Bioko - which only represents 7% of the total land area of the country - appears to be a totally insufficient measure to counter the real problem of deforestation being caused by international trade. May 2001.

Transnational loggers in the forest

Equatorial Guinea is a forest-rich country, and its valuable species - Okoumé, Ilomba, Andouk - have attracted the logging industry, particularly since the early 1990s. Most of the country - some 2.2 million hectares - is covered by forests, which provide for the livelihoods of between 80-90% of the population, which obtains fuelwood, food, medicines, building materials and other products from it.

Industrial timber production has rapidly increased since the mid-1990s at rates considered to be unsustainable. Commercial logging has been banned on Bioko Island (due to its high biodiversity level) but no similar measures were taken on the mainland (Rio Muni), where approximately

1.5 million hectares of productive forests have been allocated as industrial logging concessions.

The forests of Equatorial Guinea are divided into two domains: conservation forest (protected areas) and productive forest. The latter is composed of forest plots (small areas of primary or secondary forest located within farms), community forests (granted permanently to local communities because of their traditional rights) and national forests, that belong to the state and are exploited in partnership with private companies. In fact, most of the 1.5 million hectares of production forests have been allocated as industrial logging concessions.

In the continental region of the country there are currently 80 logging concessions being exploited by a number of companies from different countries such as Malaysia, Spain, France, Korea, Lebanon, China. There has however been a major shift in foreign involvement in logging. Until the mid 1990s most companies were owned by mainly Spanish capital, while now Asian companies have become dominant. Within these, a subsidiary of the Malaysian company Rimbunan Hijau - Shimmer International - now carries out most of the logging in the country, allegedly through having strong ties with the President's son, who happens to be the Minister of Forests.

Moreover, this Malaysian logging company has been accused of being "one of the worst in the world". Richard Wilcox's study "Asian Economies Fuel Forest Meltdown", published in *The New Observer*, says that Rimbunan Hijau Ltd. has become one of the most ruthless logging companies in the world due to abuses of national laws and regulations, human rights violations and contractual breaches". This company is exploiting forests not only in Malaysia but also in Brazil, Russia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and a number of Central African countries.

The shift from European to Asian logging companies is also reflected in export figures. Until 1992, Europe was the destination of 85% of log production, but since the mid-1990s Asia has become the main destination of the country's log exports. In 1994, 54% of timber exports went mostly to Japan and to a lesser degree to China. On the other hand, Europe is practically the sole destination of processed wood products

Enforcement of legal requirements is virtually non-existent regarding commercial logging. For instance, total wood production had by 1997 gone up to 760,000 cubic metres per year, while the legal limit was

450,000 cubic metres. Another clear infringement of the law is related to wood processing in the country. Although concessionaires are obliged to must process 60% of their production, in practice most timber from Equatorial Guinea is still being exported as raw logs.

In sum, the rich forests of Equatorial Guinea are being depleted, thus depriving local people of their sources of livelihood for the benefit of a few transnational logging companies and local elites. August 2001.

ERITREA

Sustainable forest use threatened by government policies

The Western Lowlands of Eritrea are the easternmost extension of the Sahel, lying between Eritrea's border with the Sudan and the Eritrean/Ethiopian highlands. Their hills and plains are mainly covered with semi-desert scrub and savannah woodland and interrupted by three river valleys clothed with remarkably dense woodland, some of it mixed acacia and dom palm and elsewhere almost pure stands of dom palm (*Hyphaene thebaica*).

Six ethnic groups live there, amounting to several hundred thousand people with their distinct survival systems characterised by flexibility to face the numerous natural and human-made plights which have played havoc in the past forty years. Major droughts and war have led to a collapse of the farming system, many deaths and mass exodus of the population as refugees. In 1998-2000, the Lowlands were invaded by Ethiopian armies.

At all times, forest products play a crucial role in people's livelihoods. All the tribes rely largely on the forest to meet their subsistence needs (housing, tools and some food) and dom palm fibre is the principal source of cash income for the majority of the Lowland population (belonging to the Tigre, the Beni Amer and the hidareb tribes).

Also, in peacetime and when rainfall levels allow at least some cropping and herding, the poorer members of the community or those who cannot farm land - such as the many war widows - make a living on cutting, weaving and selling palm. Also dom palm nuts are a food of last resort in the hungry season before harvests, and in drought years they become a staple food for many.

One ethnic group - the Kunama - has a distinctly different approach to the forest. They cut very little palm for income, but collect food from twenty or more tree species. These include the dom palm and others that they value as food reserves for drought years when their crops fail: for them the riverine forests are their insurance, rather than a regular income source.

The resilience of the farming system is given by forest harvesting which enables poor farmers to survive and entire communities to face bad years. However, the agricultural extension services of the Eritrean government have collided with the traditional system, partly because of the unfounded belief that palm leaf cutting is carried out in ways that damage the tree, but mainly because the government has other priorities: the forests occupy fertile land with high water tables, which is ideal for irrigated agriculture of cash crops such as onions and bananas. Increasing production of these is a high priority for the government, in order to raise hard currency through exports, and to attract investment.

On the other hand, the local population values the forest highly, which has until now been a major factor in its conservation. They have established harvesting patterns governed by informal regulations and they have a deep understanding of the nature of dom palm regeneration and growth. These systems prevent over-cutting through restricting access and over-frequent cutting, and have for generations proven to be sustainable. September 2001.

ETHIOPIA

Deforestation and monoculture plantations behind the fires

A mountainous tropical country with altitudes of over 4,000 metres, Ethiopia has many regions which were once rich in vegetation and are now rocky, desert areas. Desertification and erosion have further increased within the past decade.

Almost all the forests in Ethiopia have been destroyed in the last 40 years, according to a study by the United Nations. Less than 3% of the entire country is now covered with trees, compared to the 40% of a century ago and 16% in the early 1950s, prompting fears of an impending environmental disaster in this country which is home to coffee and one of the biodiversity hotspots of the world, now with large areas exposed to heavy soil erosion.

The primary cause of deforestation - with an estimated rate of 200,000 hectares/year - has been extensive forest clearing for export driven agriculture and over-grazing, and also commercial exploitation of forests for fuelwood and construction materials. Development projects - including coffee and tea cash cropping, human resettlement, grazing and logging operations - undertaken by government agencies upon assistance of many international and bilateral organisations have put pressure on high forest areas. The dissected terrain, the extensive areas with slopes above 16 percent, and the high intensity of rainfall lead to accelerated soil erosion once deforestation occurs.

The most threatened vegetation zones of the country are not found in the wildlife designated areas; these are the moist evergreen forests and the dry evergreen forests, the most extensive and most widely used forest resources. Except for the Bale National Park which contains only small patches of both types of forests, and the small Menagesha state forest near Addis Ababa, there are no protected forest areas in the country.

A four-month study carried out on behalf of the UN Emergency Unit for Ethiopia reported that there has been an obvious climatic change in the last 30 or 40 years. Geographer Eve Guinandi explained that the environment was changing from forests to bush to savannah and then becoming semi-arid. "If you talk to older farmers they tell you that their areas were covered in forests. They also tell you that the temperatures have gone up and now there are few rains if any", he said.

The increase of temperature due to lack of trees, severe soil erosion and commercial monoculture plantations with cash crops and trees like the eucalyptus have totally disrupted the environment. Thus, the traditional practice of communities to prepare the land through fires - which they have used for centuries - has got wild and become a peril which is wreaking havoc throughout the country, hiding the real underlying causes of Ethiopia's environmental disaster. February 2002.

GABON

Logging: The French colonial approach

Gabon is one of the richest in biodiversity and less populated countries of Africa. Until a few years ago, 85% of its forests were primary rainforests, inhabited by indigenous peoples. However, the current development

model - aimed at the exploitation of wood, oil, uranium and other minerals
- is rapidly destroying those rainforests.

Logging is carried out everywhere and transnational logging companies are active agents of the destruction of the tropical forests in this country. Livelihoods of the Pygmy population are disappearing, while gorillas, chimpanzees, mandrills and elephants are in danger of extinction as a consequence of hunting.

One specifically rich forest - the Ipassa Mingouli on the Ivindo River - has been the subject of negotiations between Gabonese authorities, the Project for Conservation and Sustainable Development Ipassa-Mingouli and institutions such as IUCN (the World Conservation Union), the European Union (EU) and UNESCO.

In November 1995 the Rougier Group - the French timber company who has its logging concessions in the area of the Project - and IUCN signed an agreement for a sustainable development of natural resources in the area, financially supported by the EU. Due to various facts, the EU and IUCN delayed the beginning of the project. In the meantime, the Rougier Group, without informing its partners, deeply logged inside the core conservation zone of the Ipassa Mingouli Project and opened roads for logging trucks.

This invasion, carried out by the Rougier Group in the core conservation zone of the Project, was discovered during the CNN shooting for Wild Planet programme by the CNN journalist Gary Strieker and the Italian activist Giuseppe Vassallo of WEESA, a recently created environmental network of students from European Universities.

These events show the social and environmental impacts of the activities of transnational logging companies in tropical countries, whose profits stem from the destructive exploitation of local resources to supply wood for parquet floors and furniture to some privileged people in the North. September 1998.

The endangered primary forests

Gabon is one of the few countries in Central Africa where most of its forest still remains unlogged. But unless something is done soon, it will follow the path of neighbouring Cameroon, where two thirds of its forests have been logged at least once during the past few years. As loggers

deplete African forests, they turn their attention to the few remaining frontier forests and Gabon seems to be the ideal candidate for those activities. Log production has already increased from 1 million cubic metres in 1975 to almost 3 million by the late 1990s.

Gabon's forests hold high levels of endemism (species that do not occur elsewhere) and therefore deforestation implies the complete loss of those species. Selective logging of some few commercial species (50% of Gabon's timber exports concentrate on the tree species 'okoume') has enormous impacts on the forest, because it implies opening up extensive areas through a network of roads and trails to reach and extract the desired species. This transport network is then used by commercial hunters, resulting in an increase in the bushmeat trade, including endangered and legally protected species. The opening of the forest by roads and selective logging is usually followed by the conversion of forests to cash crop plantations.

Logging in Gabon is a typically mining operation, generating few incomes in the country but huge profits for foreign companies. Almost all timber exports consist of raw logs, thus creating only few and badly paid jobs in logging and almost none in the wood-based industrial sector. Foreign currency obtained through roundwood exports is also low, due its the lack of added value. On the other side, just seven companies have access to more than a third of the country's remaining frontier forests. French company Thanry holds a 600,000 hectare concession; Malaysia's Rimbunan Hijau some 530,000 hectares; Germany's Glunz 500,000; three further Malaysian companies hold 650,000 hectares, while a company of unknown nationality (Bois et Scierie du Gabon/FOBO) has a 430,000 hectare concession. November 1999.

Logging companies' promised "development"

Gabon's primary rainforests are disappearing at a high speed. Logging of precious tropical wood is practised as a depredatory activity, where transnational logging companies, that hold huge concessions, make big money, while local communities have to bear the costs.

Logging in the Mingouli region, near Libreville, is an example of the above. At the community of Ovan, people are concerned by destructive logging activities that are devastating the region, carried out within a

framework of negligence by the authorities of the Waters and Forests Administration, and the lack of interests by politicians.

Under the pretext that local people are not able to "develop", logging companies are depriving them of their forests, paying scarce sums of money for coveted tropical wood - as okoume and other species - and causing negative effects on people's livelihoods and their environment. A scarcity of wildlife - used by local communities - due to increasing deforestation has been denounced. Additionally, the promised "development" has never come true. Logging companies do not invest in the villages, and the promised new schools and infrastructure have not arrived to benefit their inhabitants. Once they enter the area, they take as much precious wood as possible and forget about their promises. The main companies responsible for these damages are: Rougier-Océan, SHM, FOX, BSG, Sélectionna, Leroy, and Lutexo which have logged or are presently logging in the region. Even if local dwellers feel cheated and disillusioned by the companies' false promises, and feel abandoned by those who have the obligation to defend the country's resources, they are now organizing themselves to resist further destruction and to save the country's rainforests. April 2000.

Rich forests or cheap source of wood?

A report recently released on the situation of the forestry sector in Gabon confirms the existence of a negative trend that is leading to the destruction of the country's rich primary forests to the hands of a few foreign companies. The report titled "First Look at Logging in Gabon" and issued by the World Resources Institute (WRI) as part of its new initiative Global Forest Watch (GFW), where several Gabonese NGOs take part, reveals that more than a half of Gabon's forests have already been allocated as logging concessions and these areas have more than doubled in the last five years. In 1997, 221 companies and individuals held logging concessions, but only 13 companies were beneficiaries of 50% of the total area. According to the report, the five largest concession holders are the Europe-based Rougier-Gabon, La Compagnie Forestière du Gabon (CFG), Leroy-Gabon, La Compagnie Equatoriale des Bois (CEB) and Lutexfo/Soforga. The presence of a German and several Malaysian big companies had been previously reported as well. Greenpeace has informed that in 1991 more than three quarters of Gabon's forests - which still cover 85% of the country's total area - had

been granted as logging concessions. China and France are the most important export markets of Gabonese roundwood.

The report states that Gabon's logging industry is vulnerable to market swings since it depends on just one tree species - the okoumé (*Aucoumea kleineana*) - which is found only in a restricted area of the Congo Basin: Gabon, and parts of Congo and Equatorial Guinea. Although this precious wood has recently been used in important works in the North - as the new National Library of Paris and the Eurostar Train - it is primarily exported to make plywood.

Even though the report considers that the new Forestry Law, first proposed in 1997, provides an opportunity to help rectify the problems that face forestry by setting new standards for better natural resource management, as a matter of fact legislation to fight illegal logging is weak. Additionally, protection norms are poorly implemented and enforced by a government suffering from financial, human and logistic shortage. For example, the Forestry Law states that Classified Forests must be regulated by a management plan -but procedures and regulations for these plans have not been defined yet. In fact, in 1999 only 5 out of more than 200 logging companies had started - or were planning to start - writing a management plan. In 1997, only 100 government employees were available to monitor and inspect 322 logging concessions covering 86,000 square kilometres. It is difficult to imagine how this kind of control can be an effective tool to protect one of the world's richest and largest still existing forest ecosystems, menaced by foreign market forces, which see it just as an abundant and cheap source of roundwood. July 2000.

Polemic agreement on the Lope Reserve

Last July the government of Gabon, logging companies operating in the country and some environmental groups - among which the World Wildlife Fund - reached an agreement to keep the Lope Reserve out of the reach of commercial logging. However, the deal includes a redrawing of the boundaries of the reserve subtracting 10,352 hectares of land on the southeastern flank - that holds the richest stands of valuable okoume trees - and adding about 5,200 hectares of a previously not protected area of remote upland primary forests.

The agreement has generated opposite reactions. For those in favour, the net result of the agreement will be positive, since the new area

incorporated to the reserve is a priceless reservoir of biodiversity. They also argue that thanks to the agreement loggers have committed themselves for the first time not to violate the boundaries of the protected area. According to one of the defenders of the agreement "we've gone from a situation where about two-thirds of the reserve was actually in logging concessions to the point where we've lost some land but the whole reserve is protected from logging forever. "For the logging companies, the now protected highland forest presented significant logistical challenges - requiring expensive road construction and costly harvesting methods - and in exchange they will now have more access to the valuable okoume stands.

However, environmental groups such as the Rainforest Foundation, that have been fighting against logging in the area consider that logging companies - mostly French and Malaysian - have too much economic power and influence on the government to actually comply with this commitment. They say that the loss of a previously protected area sounds much like a giveaway, while the right thing to do would have been for the government to enforce the existing laws. There is no guarantee that, in the name of "realism", in the future the protected area borders will not be changed again and again. September 2000.

Forests and the climate debate

Gabon's main exports are oil and timber. Both activities contribute to climate change. While the exports of the former result in fossil fuel emissions abroad, the latter result in carbon emissions at home and abroad through the release of the carbon that was stored in the forest biomass. Does this mean that Gabon - as well as many other similar Southern countries - should be blamed for climate change? Within the international context, it is very clear that the country is a victim of the rules of a game established by industrialized countries and for their benefit.

Gabon's forests are being mined by a number of transnational companies, including French, German, Malaysian and others - all countries that participate actively at both the Climate Change and the Biodiversity Conventions. Gabon is one of the less populated countries of Africa, which makes it clear that it is not "overpopulation" but overconsumption abroad which is to be blamed for the increasing rate of deforestation.

The current "development" model makes it necessary for Gabon to increase the production and export of both timber and oil. Within that framework, as long as overconsumption is not addressed, the country will continue exporting timber. In the same manner, as long as the world's economy continues being based on fossil fuel energy, Gabon will continue exporting increasing volumes of oil. As in the case of what's happening in most of the South, the country, its people and its forests will simply become poorer.

In that context, it is clear that Gabon's forests will not be saved by exchanging some money for "carbon permits" for industrialized countries to continue emitting the CO₂ contained in Gabon's - and other exporters' - oil. It is not Gabon which is responsible for climate change, but unless the rules of the game are changed, it will continue contributing to it and suffering the consequences. October 2000.

The new Forestry Law and transnational companies

The draft Forestry Law discussed by the Gabonese Parliament encourages the industrialization of wood within the country. According to the Ministry for Waters and Forests, the new law will establish more strict rules concerning the exploitation of the country's forests. Concessions to private companies will be granted for a longer period of time, allegedly to favour the regeneration of the forest. The government elected in December 1998 argues that its policy tries to conciliate the interests of different agents involved, with the aim of protecting the forests, and at the same time diversifying its products. The Gabonese forestry sector has until now strongly relied on the export of a single product: okoumé roundwood.

Even though this initiative, which tends to the diversification of the country's economy, can be considered positive from a macroeconomic point of view, capital questions remain unsolved. One of them is that of public control over the use of natural resources. In Gabon, as well as in other African countries, due to institutional structural constraints protection norms are poorly implemented and enforced. Does the new legislation create financial mechanisms to ensure that the companies' operations are effectively controlled on the ground?

The second relevant point is that of the so-called "stakeholders". While transnational logging companies, responsible for the destruction of

tropical forests in the country, remain the most important actors, forest dwelling peoples continue to be ignored. Alternatives such as community forest management and locally-based processing facilities are not taken into account. Additionally, the new law appears to benefit specially - if not solely - large logging companies. In fact Société Forestière des Bois Tranchés, Leroy Gabon, Thanry, Groupe Rougier, Société de Grumes de la Ngounie and other important companies will be granted concessions for even longer periods, and will almost certainly be the ones industrializing roundwood, thus reaping the benefits of added value to the product.

In the context of an economy heavily dependent on the exploitation of natural resources, massive foreign debt, and weak organization of rural communities and civil society, the colonial vision prevails of the forest as a mere source of wood managed and exploited by foreign private companies. The new Forestry Law does not seem to help to revert this situation. November 2000.

More logging concessions in the hands of foreign firms

With a total area of 268,000 square kilometres, 80% of which are forests and many of them primary rainforests, Gabon is Africa's second largest timber producer. Okoumé and, to a lesser extent, Ozigo wood species represent the bulk of Gabon's production accounting for up to 80% of the country's total timber production.

Mostly based on natural resource extraction - including timber - for export markets, Gabon's economy has been highly vulnerable to external factors like the Asian economic crisis, which drove it to a financial crisis in 1998, higher unemployment and increased poverty and indebtedness.

Although with the highest GNP per capita in the continent, those are void figures which do not reflect the real internal distribution of wealth since the monies go to a local elite while most of the population remain in poverty.

The forestry sector is the second source of foreign exchange after oil, and like many neighbouring countries the Gabonese government as well as international financial institutions regard the exploitation of timber as central to macro-economic development thus leading to a rapid increase in logging.

Forestry legislation in force goes in support of commercial logging, for example increasing considerably the area of concessions: from 10% of

the forest land in 1957 to some 59 % in 1999. It has also promoted the dominance of overseas capital in the forestry sector.

In the coastal logging zone which is reserved for Gabonese nationals, logging is commonly sub-contracted to foreign logging companies, a practice known as "fermage", which fosters rent-seeking and involves a loss of tax revenue because the transfer of logging rights is poorly regulated. Permit owners receive large rents without feeling responsible for investing in their concessions; logging companies have no interest in doing so either.

Logging in Gabon is selective but not sustainable. It has been argued that, as only a small number of Okoumé trees are removed, they would easily regenerate. But recent studies indicate that creaming off the best trees results in lower quality timber.

Logging not also contributes to increase commercial bushmeat hunting leading to wildlife decimation, but also causes soil erosion, in particular on slopes, and pollution through the chemicals used to treat the wood.

Although a new forestry law has been drafted to be approved this year - under pressure from the IMF and World Bank - it promotes further industrialisation of the forests and does little to address the dominance of foreign capital in the industry or to mitigate poverty.

Once again, "development" schemes generally fostered from outside and replicated along southern countries rich in natural resources, bring money to national and international elites but not for the people. November 2001.

GAMBIA

A different type of forest degradation

As in many other countries, Gambia's forests are facing a type of forest degradation which implies the substitution of native species by an exotic. But this is not the common situation where plantation companies substitute native forests by eucalyptus, pines or palm oil plantations. In this case, the villain is a "good" tree, brought into the country by Indian immigrants: the Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*). In India, this tree has a number of positive features, among which the production of a useful natural pesticide. In Gambia, it is becoming a pest. But not because native forests are being cut to plant neem: the tree is slowly invading the forest and getting increasingly out of control.

Such situation is not unique to Gambia. Many non-native trees and shrubs are becoming invasive in many of the world's forests, leading to dramatic changes in forests' floristic composition and subsequent changes in local wildlife and peoples' livelihoods. December 1998.

A case of community forest management

Gambia used to be covered by very dense forests. However, the country has undergone a severe deforestation and degradation process. In 1981, about 430,000 hectares were classified as forests - 45% of the total land area. Seven years later, the forest area was reduced to about 340,000 hectares.

Gambian forests have also undergone a degradation process that implied the conversion of many closed forests into a poor quality tree and shrub savannah category, according to the national forest inventory of 1998.

The institutional framework implemented in the 1950's, with the aim of protecting the remaining forests gave the state overall power over the national forest resources, depriving the rural population of responsibility for forest management.

In the mid-1980's, awareness grew about the state of forests and the potential of natural forest management, leading to a new approach. The Department of Forestry realised that its efforts would be futile unless local communities were committed and involved in the process. Also, that was a long-term demand by the local communities, so the change in the government approach matched with the needs of the population.

In 1990, the first community forestry interventions were implemented in what has been perceived as a process of confidence building and demand driven. Each village has to establish a Forest Committee, generally formed on the basis of the already existing village institutional structure, with representation from both the male and the female members of the community.

Traditional leaders are involved from the beginning of the process, and their participation ensures the customary ownership of the forest land by the community, helping to stem any future conflict between different villages which jointly manage community forests.

Gambian authorities recognise that the practice of community forest management is not without problems. The difficulty to create the sense of

forest ownership among the villagers is the result of mistrust about governmental actions and policies. To build it up, the use of financial or material incentives is avoided. No compensations are given to the villagers for the protection and plantation work they are accomplishing in their forests. A task decided by the forest committee and executed by the villagers without external support strengthens the perception that they are the real owners of their work and therefore of their forest.

A long consultation process of the Gambian community forest management policy and legislation has reaffirmed the need to return authority for forest management to the local communities.

The undertaking has contributed to an important extent to poverty alleviation within the project area - the entire Central River Division, one of five administrative regions of The Gambia - by the sustainable improvement of the economic revenues of the local population. The empowerment of the communities as well as their support to the Forestry Department in the management of the forest will, in the long run, also contribute to and strengthen decentralisation within The Gambia.

As the director of Forestry, Jatto Sillah, puts it: "Unlike the past, governments must start involving the population and communities in decision making, in designing and implementing programs. In order to facilitate better coordinated actions, the best tool for sustainable forest management should be 'the bottom-up approach'. In simple terms, the people should be mandated to work out their preference of resource management, and institutions (Government, NGOs) would provide the technical assistance."

The change in the approach of the Gambian authorities which has led to a combination of political will and local community participation is an interesting progress towards the sustainable management and utilisation of the forest resources, which deserves to be taken into account by the rest of the region. July 2002.

GHANA

FAO supports private plantations

The Ghanaian Government has signed an agreement with the FAO to support private forestry plantations in the country. The government will benefit from a US\$ 138,500 assistance package under the agreement, to

design long term mechanisms to support private forestry plantations in the country.

Under a two-month project by the FAO and the Ministry of Lands and Forestry, FAO is providing the money and two foreign consultants to team up with local experts to research into private forestry plantation development and a flexible scheme for providing plantation incentives to firms, land owners, communities and individuals.

It will also come out with terms for the necessary institutional capacity for implementing practical options and ensuring effective monitoring of the results. The results envisaged by the project are long-term financing mechanisms including incentives to support a financially viable private forest plantation programme in Ghana, and information for improved private plantation management and the improved participation of small farmers in plantation development.

The Minister of Lands and Forestry, Mr Cletus Avoka, who signed the agreement on behalf of the government, said that for some time now, the government's attention has been captured by the issue of sustainable forest management and the need to maintain a raw material base.

He said reasonable programmes had been established to ensure that the numerous mills in the country were satisfied to enable them to produce to feed both local and international markets.

Ghana lost about one third of its forest within 17 years between 1955 to 1972. Since 1977, the country's virgin forests have been reduced from 7.44 million hectares to 1.84 million hectares through what government officials term as illegal and unconventional means. The rate of 1.71 per cent mean annual deforestation in this area exceeds that of both Asia (0,66%) and Tropical America (0,84%). By: William Appiah. September 1997.

The impacts of mining

In many tropical areas mining is a major cause of deforestation and forest degradation, generating a large number of social and environmental impacts. A recent study published by Third World Network-Africa provides a detailed picture of those impacts in the Wassa West District of Ghana. What follows has been extracted from that publication.

The main minerals being mined in Ghana are gold, diamonds, bauxite and manganese, but the most dominant mineral commodity is gold. The ownership structure of the mining industry is mixed, but foreign companies control an average of about 70% shares in these mines. The dominant players are mainly junior companies from Canada, Australia and South Africa, but there are also investments from United States, United Kingdom, Norway and China. While major foreign companies own most mines, prospecting is normally undertaken by junior companies, largely local, Canadian and Australian.

In the specific case of forests, those investment have proven to be devastating. Surface mining represents a serious threat to the last vestiges of Ghana's forest resources and threatens the rich biodiversity of the country's tropical rainforest. There is a growing conflict between sustainable forest management and mining activities. The Tarkwa area - where the research was carried out - lies in the prime timber-producing region with a good overlay of forest reserves. The area is said to contain 44% of the country's closed forest. In primary forest areas, trees reach heights of up to 45 metres, but these are at the summit of hills where mining has not yet reached. Ironically, it has the highest concentration of surface mines and exploration companies - 8 of the country's 14 large-scale mines are located in the area - some of which with licenses to operate in known forest reserves.

The removal of the forest cover is rapidly drying up rivers and streams, leading to the extinction of river hosted animal and plant species. Protected species such as the Red River hog, the roan antelope, the red Colobus monkey and the black Colobus monkeys are some of the species associated with tropical rainforest. At the community level, the threat to ecological biodiversity has economic implications: increased mining activities in the area have partly led to the reduction or extinction of certain flora and fauna species that the communities depend on. Many communities complain that snails, mushrooms, medicinal plants, etc. are no longer available in the area due partly to mining activities.

Additionally, mining has led to growing conflicts among communities displaced by mining operations, as well as to serious mining-related health and social problems (such as malaria, tuberculosis, conjunctivitis, skin diseases, prostitution, drug abuse, high cost of living, inadequate shelter, etc.) and impacts such as polluted community water sources, air and noise pollution, depletion of underground water resources, etc.

As the study explains: "...while the policy changes introduced generous incentives to investors, the benefits of such investments to the nation are quite doubtful". December 2000.

What's hidden behind the Bui Dam Project?

Dams constitute a major direct and indirect cause of nature destruction and disruption of local population's lives worldwide. Even though international concern on this issue is on the rise, national governments, together with transnational consulting and construction firms and with the aid of international financial institutions continue going ahead with this kind of megaprojects. They are usually surrounded by corruption and almost always result in widespread human rights violations against local communities.

The African continent is not an exception to the rule. The same as in the cases of Kenya, Namibia and Uganda, dam megaprojects in Ghana have caused and are about to provoke severe impacts on people and the environment. In 1965, 80,000 farmers of the Volta River valley were forced to move from their lands because of the construction of the Akosombo Hydropower Dam, which flooded more land than any other dam in the world: 8,500 km², almost 4% of the entire area of the country. The dam also set in motion waterborne diseases, especially bilharzia and malaria. Later on, between 1978 and 1981, the Kpong Dam in Ghana displaced 6,000 people and despite assurances that the mistakes of Akosombo would not be repeated, the resettlement programme actually caused problems worse than those of Akosombo.

Nevertheless, the Ghanaian government pretends to ignore reality. Presenting the country's annual budget to Parliament on March 9, 2001, the country's Finance Minister, Mr. Yaw Safo-Marfo reiterated his government's commitment to construct a new dam on the Black Volta River, at the present site of the Bui National Park, "to further augment power generation capacity in the country and in line with the pledge contained in the government's agenda for positive change". The 400Mw Bui Dam hydroelectric project is scheduled to start producing hydroelectric energy in 2006. The construction of the dam by a consortium led by Brown and Root of the United Kingdom, is supposed to start in 2002 at a cost of US\$ 900 million. The 660 km² reservoir would flood all the riverine forests of the Bui National Park, considered the last pristine wilderness in the entire Volta System. The park is home to the largest of two groups of

hippos left in Ghana, and of a variety of primates, leopards, ungulates, lizards, butterflies, birds, fish, fruitbat, rodent, dragonflies and other fauna.

A recent decision by the country's authorities concerning this polemic issue has given place to harsh critics: the British zoologist Daniel Bennett, who had been conducting biological research in the Park since 1996, has been banned from it. Nick Ankudey, director of the Wildlife Division of Ghana's Forestry Commission, said that the area is now politically sensitive and that his studies are no longer in the national interest. His decision was backed by the Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mining. The argument for such an arbitrary decision is that the country's authorities had found "unacceptable" the conclusions that Dr. Bennett published in his web site. The British zoologist had stated that were the dam built, the rich flora and fauna of the Park would disappear, and the feeding grounds of the hippos would be destroyed, thus forcing the hungry hippos to move north of the park into inhabited areas. In such situation, Dr. Bennett stated that there might be "no choice but to destroy the vast majority of them in the interests of people's safety."

"The intention seems to be to ensure that nothing challenges the results of the recently commissioned environmental impact assessment of the Bui Dam Project, to be conducted by the Canadian company ACRES under contract from the Volta River Authority. An assessment paid for by the organization constructing the dam does not constitute an acceptable level of research if the area is to be destroyed," said Bennett.

Members of the local and international environmental community reacted denouncing the Wildlife Division's decision as "arbitrary, capricious, excessive and unnecessary". For them, the "decision is utterly illogical and an insult to democracy and justice". In the same line Mr. Joshua Awuku Apau of the Green Earth Organisation in Ghana said the decision could taint the image of the country.

Many questions remain to be answered. Why have independent scientific activities regarding the conservation of a wilderness area to be affected by a dam megaproject been banned? Why has this decision been taken just before ACRES, a firm contracted by the dam developers presents an Environmental Impact Assessment of the project? Is this not contradictory with the declared intention of the Ghanaian government to combine development with the protection of the environment? What's really hidden behind the Bui Dam Project? May 2001.

The documented impacts of oil palm monocultures

More than 125,000 hectares of land are under oil palm cultivation in Ghana, mostly under the nucleus estate model, which implies a large plantation surrounded by smaller plantations established in local farmers' lands.

The large scale plantations were implemented by the State at the expense of local peoples lands, with little or no compensation for the cottages, camps, and farms lost, together with various land-use or proprietary rights. As could have been expected, this resulted in social resistance, as in the case of the dramatic refusal of the migrant Ningo farmers of Atobriso and Okaikrom to grant government and Ghana Oil Palm Development Company officials entry into their acquired land. The peasants' resistance has also included pilfering of palm fruit from the plantations as well as acts of sabotage, which resulted in the tightening of security at considerable cost to the plantation companies.

But, according to Ghanaian researcher Edwin A. Gyasi, "perhaps the most serious adverse effect has been the rapid transformation of the forest ecosystem and its resilient diversified ecologically based traditional economy into a vulnerable artificial monocultural system. Instability, risks, or uncertainties are inherent features of the natural environment, which the peasant farmers recognize. Traditionally, the peasants try to minimize these environmental risks, combat soil erosion, optimize utilization of the different soil nutrients, and enhance food security by intermixing crops of varying degrees of environmental sensitivity and different nutritional value, and by other forms of agricultural diversification and risk minimization. The resilient, diversified indigenous agriculture, modelled on the forest ecosystem and based on eco-farming principles borne out of the peasants' intimate knowledge of the natural environment, is being replaced by the risk-prone monocultural system, with devastating consequences for the forest ecosystem."

Among the major impacts, the following have been recorded:

- shortages of local staple foods
- the vulnerability of the monocultural palm farms to insect pests and diseases, which have experienced unusually massive and destructive insect invasions
- the difficulty of marketing palm fruit and oil associated with poor marketing facilities for the increased output

- deforestation, and the associated growing cost and scarcity of forest products such as "bush meat", medicinal plants, and wood, an important constructional material and the basic fuel source
- the high cost, erratic supplies, and polluting effect of the agrochemicals used to boost palm yields and to control pests and weeds, especially in the large plantations
- environmental pollution by the palm fruit and palm oil effluents

In sum, although large-scale oil palm plantations might appear to be attractive because of their ability to accelerate agricultural production and agro-industrial growth, they are basically vulnerable and have adverse effects on traditional landholding and land-use rights, on food and fuel security, and on the natural environment. June 2001.

IMF, mining and logging

Beginning in 1983, Ghana has been implementing IMF structural adjustment programs focused on export-led growth, which has included measures to devalue the currency and remove various barriers to trade. While this has resulted in significant economic gains, it has also meant severe detrimental consequences for the rainforests and forest-dwelling people of this western African nation. Ghana's most recent three-year, US\$ 239 million loan from the IMF was initiated in 1999, and modified in 2000.

Upon the advice of the IMF, Ghana relaxed mining regulations and nurtured investment by the mining industry through generous incentives and tariff reductions during the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, more than 250 mining companies have been granted concessions, totalling 58,167 square kilometres. Most of these companies operate surface mines, but a few are underground mining operators. Diamonds, bauxite, manganese, and especially gold are the predominant minerals sought in Ghana, and most are being extracted by Canadian, Australian, South African, United States, and other foreign-owned interests.

Export earnings from mining have overtaken earnings from cocoa. From 1992 to 1995, mining exports climbed from US\$ 107.9 million to US\$ 682.2 million. Output for Ghana's gold industry alone grew by 500 percent between 1983 and 1995, and by 750 percent between 1983 and 1998.

Mining in Ghana has had a tremendously detrimental effect on the country's tropical forests, which blanket one-third of the nation. Sixty percent of rainforests in Ghana's Wassa West District have already been destroyed by mining operations, which have also polluted surface and groundwater with cyanide and other chemicals.

The mines have also devastated local communities. Nearby villages suffer from contaminated water supplies and cracked buildings from the mines' blasting. In many cases, the land used for mining operations in Ghana has been forcibly acquired from peasant farmers under ambiguous regulations. Sometimes this acquisition occurred with no compensation. In some instances, the mines have been responsible for the dislocation and forced resettlement of communities numbering in the hundreds and even thousands. Numerous violations of human rights, including shootings and beatings, have also been committed in relation to the mines.

Since 1981, Ghana has experienced forest loss at a rate of 750 hectares/year, or two percent. Forest cover has dropped to 25 percent of its original size, owing to a rate of deforestation that has increased by 50 percent in ten years.

A combination of logging by multinational companies and rural residents seeking income for their basic needs has fuelled what is now Ghana's third largest export sector. Between 1983 and 1988, forestry grew six-fold in terms of revenues. At the current rate, the Ghanaian trees mahogany, odum and afromosia are expected to be depleted by 2007. By: Jason Tockman. January 2002.

Protected areas at the expense of people do not guarantee conservation

Ghana has created a number of protected areas - managed by the Forestry Commission and the Department of Wildlife - as a means of ensuring biodiversity conservation. However, the process of creation of some of those areas has generated a number of problems which explains the failure of many protected areas to fulfil the objective for which they were established. Among other problems explaining such situation, mention must be made of issues relating to land tenure, land rights of communities and law enforcement.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) conducted a research in a protected area in Ghana - the Kalakpa Reserve - located in the Volta region of Ghana, a few kilometres from Ho, the regional capital. Before the park was created, the land was occupied by migrant farmers through an arrangement with the land-owners. The farmers have lived there legitimately for generation after generation.

The study has proven that a main problem and challenge at the reserve - created through an agreement between the government and the land-owners - is that the communities living in the reserve were not consulted about its creation. As long as the interest of the migrant families was not taken into account at the outset, it has been very hard to move forward. So while there is a tripartite interest in the area - the local landowners, the settler farmers and the government - the negotiation for acquisition totally ignored the interest of these settler farmers. They have farms in this designated protected area, settlements which keep on growing and even cattle farms.

The government is now describing the settler farmers as squatters and sees as its responsibility to get them out, although without any appreciable success. But they are not squatters, they are long-standing inhabitants who must have a voice in land use activities and changes.

The farmers are challenging the authorities; they want to continue carrying out their economic activities; they want to see their rights to remain in the area respected. The government has responded by attempting to compensate the people monetarily. But the whole process of valuing a supposed protected area and the payment of compensation continues to be an impossible exercise. As long as the government affixes arbitrary values which are low and have no relationship with the livelihoods of the people, compensations will continue being rejected by many farmers. Those who accept the compensation are unaware of the conditions at the place they are relocated or intend to be relocated to. As a result, they either don't go at all or, if they do, they return almost immediately to their original home.

As in many other similar cases, this experience clearly shows that the whole process of creating and maintaining protected areas should be addressed taking into account the interest of all relevant stakeholders, and the implementation of the law must attend to the needs and rights of holders. The establishment of protected areas must not be antagonistic to local peoples' livelihoods, and fundamental human rights cannot be violated in the process. Unless the creation of a reserve is done properly,

you may have a protected area, but biodiversity conservation will not be at all guaranteed. April 2002.

Ancient tradition in community forest management

Although Ghana is a country with an annual deforestation rate of 1,71%, which in 17 years (1955-1972) lost one third of its forests and further 5,6 million hectares from 1977 to 1997, it also holds ancient keys for a meaning model of forest conservation.

However, government attempts at dealing with biodiversity loss have applied a reductionist approach which has implied the establishment of protected areas at the expense of people. Experience shows that this eventually fails to achieve the proposed goal.

And the solution is out there, in old systems which until recently remained extremely effective. Long before official organisations were established to carry out sustainable forest management and conservation, there were traditional community resource management systems. A prominent feature of such systems is the setting aside of patches of forest by traditional authorities for sustainable resource use and the preservation of vital biodiversity. These areas have different names in different cultures, but are often referred to as sacred groves, fetish groves, local forests or community forests. Some such forests are designated as burial grounds for chiefs or as the home of local deities. But in most cases they are intended to protect watersheds, fragile ecosystems, and plants and animals of conservation importance to local communities.

Traditional authorities are usually the title holders of such areas, and exercise general administrative functions over them. But the management, defence and preservation of such lands are the responsibility of the entire community.

Societies issued controls and sanctions to protect them, and these reserves are intact today in places where culture and traditional religions remain strong. In such reserves, the community forests or sacred groves now support a much larger variety of plant and animal life than do surrounding areas, providing vital products and services such as building materials, timber products, fuel wood, fruits and nuts, bushmeat, snails, mushrooms, and most importantly, plants that are used as traditional medicines. Harvesting is strictly selective there, controlled and allowed only at time intervals that benefit and satisfy the entire community.

On its part, the community adheres to traditional norms and regulations governing the management of these forests, as well as local norms and beliefs governing sacred or fetish groves which prohibit harvesting forest products. Entry is allowed only on specific days or periods for the performance of rituals. Most such groves are believed to contain the "earth god" or spiritual beings that promote peace and prosperity and check antisocial behaviour, and have resulted in remnant patches of primordial forest even in densely populated areas.

However, modernisation, urbanisation and the spread of Christianity and Islam have weakened once revered traditional religions and cultures, changing belief systems in most communities. Many of these sacred groves are being encroached upon and destroyed leading to a loss of livelihood for local communities that depended on forest resources for survival.

In Ghana, sacred and community forests that have contributed immensely to biodiversity conservation are also now under serious threat. Once found dotted throughout the different vegetation zones of the country, their presence ensured that endemic species restricted to that zone were protected from extinction. Remaining reserves include, to name a few, the Buabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary, the Aketenchie Community Forest, and the Akyem Community Forest at Akyem Takyiman. The Buabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary is a Ghanaian forest of global importance, home to the endangered Mona monkey and other endangered animal and plant species. It has also become a major tourist attraction, generating revenue for local communities and the nation. July 2002.

KENYA

Violence against forest activists

In January 1999, Prof. Wangari Maathai, one of the most inspiring ecofeminists and pro-democracy advocates in all of Africa, and other Kenyan activists were attacked by thugs while they were peacefully demonstrating outside Nairobi against the privatization of the Karura Forest. On February 2nd Hon. James Orengo, Hon. David Mwenje and Dr. John Makanga were arrested by the police. The day before, President Moi had spoken in favour of the privatisation of the forest. The three men were arraigned in Court by the end of the day and charged with incitement and

released on personal bonds of Ksh. 100,000 each. They were ordered to appear again before the same Magistrate on February 16th.

This is not the first time that Kenyan ecologists are victims of such kind of abuses. In 1993 armed policemen had broken into Ms. Maathai's home to arrest her.

Kenya has suffered the destruction of its forests in the name of "development". Karura Forest has been a traditional site of the Mabari ya Kihara indigenous people and the whole area is considered sacred. Nowadays it is menaced by the uncontrolled expansion of Nairobi, capital of the country, since the forest land is to be privatized. Kenya maintains one of the highest population growth rates with a high level of rural-urban migration. By means of a fax addressed to civil organizations worldwide, on February 2nd, Ms. Maathai, President of the Green Belt Movement denounces that "the government has become the greatest enemy of the environment" and claims that "the battle for Karura has nothing to do with hatred and ethnicity. On the contrary it has everything to do with love, compassion, concern and responsibility for life on this planet."

Social, environmental and religious organizations all over the country have expressed their opposition to the project. The head of the Anglican Church of Kenya Archbishop David Gitari and his Catholic Church counterpart Raphael Ndingi Mwana a Nzeki are some of the top mainstream religious leaders who have said they will soon lead protestors to Karura to express their disapproval over the allocation to private individuals. February 1999.

Ogiek people's fight to protect their forest

The Ogiek people are a hunter-gatherer people, famed as harvesters of honey, which they consume themselves and exchange with their neighbours, and who have lived from time immemorial in the forests of the Mau escarpment in Kenya.

Tinet Forest is part of their territory, and the Ogiek are their guardians. But since 1961, when the colonial government in 1961 declared it a government forest, they have lived there as squatters subject to constant harassment in their own lands. In 1991 the Kenyan government legally allocated five acres of the forest per family to 5,000 members of the Ogiek community, who began farming and constructing schools, while still using the forest and gathering honey.

But powerful interests wish to occupy the forest with the aim of using it for logging. Faced with renewed harassment and threats of eviction, as in colonial times, the Ogiek community went to the court for protection, but last May the Nakuru District Commissioner tried to preempt the case by giving the Ogiek community 14 days notice to leave the forest, threatening to use force if they resist.

The affected indigenous people reacted and community leaders met and vowed never to leave Tinet Forest until the Government allocates them land. They obtained an order of injunction from the Kenyan High Court to restrain the local government from evicting them until their case is heard in court.

The Ogiek's territorial rights must be respected as well as their traditional way of life in harmony with the environment. Eviction would deprive them of their livelihood while at the same time causing the degradation of the forest. June 1999.

The future of the Ogiek and their forests

The Ogiek people of Kenya - a minority forest-dwelling community currently composed of some 20,000 people - who have lived from time immemorial in the highland Tinet forest area of Molo in Nakuru District, have been defending their rights for decades against the arbitrariness of both colonial and post-colonial governments, which progressively pushed them to marginal areas. Only in 1991 their territorial rights were partially recognized and a portion of Tinet forest was granted to them. Nevertheless, since powerful interests wishing to occupy their lands for logging continue to threaten them, they went to court to avoid imminent eviction.

In April 7 2000 their appeal was determined as not urgent by the court. Therefore they are now exposed to the government's decision of evicting them. Their effort to hold on to the disappearing forest is being challenged by the state, which has allocated big parcels of former forest lands to the ruling elites, in addition to licensing logging in the Ogiek's forests.

If Kenya really wants to conserve these valuable forests and to act according to the international agreements for the protection of indigenous peoples it has signed, the government has to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of the Ogiek to their settlement as a forest dwelling community. Instead of forcing the Ogiek to live as marginalized people, suffering from

insecurity in their own lands, programmes should be implemented for the resettlement of the Ogiek in their traditional territories. This would ensure a better future for the Ogiek and for their forests. April 2000.

Mangroves threatened by Canadian mining company

The Kenyan coast is estimated to hold more than 10% of the world's unexplored deposits of titanium, a metal used in the pigment industry, and increasingly in the manufacture of many objects of modern life. A drilling recently performed in the Kwale area delineated a reserve of 150 million tons of sands containing rutile, ilmenite and zircon, the minerals used to make titanium.

This is very bad news for local communities living along the mangrove coast nearby Mombasa, such as those of Tsunza village, which are being threatened by a planned massive titanium mining development by a Canadian firm. The possible transformation of thousands of acres of farms and forests on the Kenyan coast into a titanium mine has sparked criticism among local community leaders. Since foreign companies operating in the mining sector in the South do not adhere to the same business and environmental standards as in their home countries, it is feared that the project will cause the rapid destruction of this valuable ecosystem. The Canadian mining industry in particular has expanded significantly overseas during the past decade provoking severe impacts both on forests and forest peoples. September 2000.

Local peoples' land rights ignored

Even though indigenous peoples and rural communities are the ones directly bearing the brunt of the destruction of rainforests by intruders, most national governments portray them as squatters and responsible for the destruction of the forest and the extinction of wildlife, and threaten them with eviction or undertake direct actions to expel them from their homeland. This kind of abuse is often linked to forest concessions awarded to logging companies - which constitutes an absurd paradox if the aim of the authorities were to protect the forest - or the declared intention of protecting endangered species, considering that nature conservation is only possible in the absence of human beings. Both types

of abuses are happening in Kenya and the following are two such examples.

Besides the Ogiek case, a second example of abuse over land rights is related to conservation. A plan to be implemented by the Kenya Wildlife Service in the Tana River District in Coast Province - with financial support from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) - to protect the red-capped manabey, an endangered monkey species, is being resisted by residents of Ngao and Ndera locations. The official promise to compensate land owners has divided the local residents into two groups: one of them accepts to move from their farms along the river, while the other vows to stay, arguing that money cannot compensate for the loss of their land and the dramatic change in their lifestyle. In fact people are proposed to move to the semi-arid plains of Ozi and Kipini where there are no rivers.

Molu Shambaro, a local leader and member of Parliament for the district, who is opposed to the eviction, has expressed that local dwellers' rights have to be respected, and has proposed that the wildlife service involves local people in their campaign to conserve the Tana River mangabey instead of forcing them to leave their lands. Shambaro asserted that if local people get involved, wildlife conservation and traditional lifestyle in the area will become compatible. He also accused both the government body and its GEF counterpart of corruption, which is considered to be the main reason for the failure of conservation projects in the country. November 2000.

Resistance to the Sondu Miriu Dam project

The Sondu Miriu River is one of the six major rivers in the Lake Victoria basin, which drains 3,470 square kilometres in the western part of Kenya. The company responsible for managing all public power generation facilities in Kenya - KenGen - is planning a dam project to be located about 400 kilometres from Nairobi. Water from the river will be diverted through a 7.2 kilometre long tunnel into a one million cubic meter reservoir and a 60 megawatt hydro power station.

This megaproject is being financed by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation together with KenGen. Kenya is the largest recipient in Africa of Japanese official "aid": in 1999 Japan devoted more than US\$ 57 million under the form of grants and loans to this aim. The civil works are

being carried out by Konoike Construction JV, Viedekke Heavy Construction Company of Norway and Murray & Roberts Contractors International of South Africa.

Even though the power station is scheduled to be operational in 2003, some of the works - like the construction of camp sites, roads, a bridge, and communication facilities - have already started, and together with them the fears over the environmental and social impacts of the project.

According to the NGO coalition Africa Water Network, the diversion of the river will cause the disruption of the whole hydrological basin, with negative consequences on wildlife. Colobus monkeys and hippopotamus, for example, which are dependent on the river will be forced to seek a source of water at the lower populous Nyakwere plains disturbing their habitat. KenGen is not taking responsibility on the issue, arguing that this is the competence of governmental agencies. The company even claims that a part of the river's flow will keep on running on the original channel. Nevertheless, similar river diversion projects for the Turkwel Gorge and Masinga hydropower dams resulted in the permanent or seasonal drying up of the courses. The blasting needed to build the tunnel will alter the geomorphology of the area, and the entire water table may be also affected by the construction.

Social impacts are already taking place. Since health precaution measures have not been put in place to handle the effects of the great dust clouds that come off the construction project, most members of the community are already suffering from eye and respiratory problems. The diversion of the river will provoke a shortage in the supply of water, which is a vital element for domestic and agricultural use by 1,500 local households. Additionally local communities have denounced that KenGen has not kept its promise of providing them electricity and irrigation facilities, as stated in the initial project documents. Now the company says that such activities are beyond its mandate. Last but not least the project has so far displaced 1,000 households through forced resettlement. In March 2000 KenGen admitted lacking plans to relocate people who will be affected by power transmission lines from the dam.

Resistance to the project is on the rise and so is repression by Kenyan authorities. Last December Argwings Odera - an activist of the Africa Water Network who works with dam affected people - was arrested, beaten and shot in an arm by the police. He is now facing criminal charges for holding meetings and trying to share information and raise awareness about the project. January 2001.

International campaign for the Ogiek

The Ogiek people of Kenya constitute an ethnic minority community, which has lived basically from hunting and honey-gathering since time immemorial in the highland Tinet forest area, which are part of the vast Mau Forests in Kenya, about 250 km west of the capital Nairobi. Some of them also practise subsistence farming and livestock breeding. Even though they consider themselves as the guardians of such forests and have managed them in a sustainable way, they have been forced to defend themselves against the arbitrariness of both colonial and post-colonial governments, who have ignored them and wanted to get hold of their lands. They resisted official arm twisting and threats, and several times went to court in the defense of their rights. The last chapter of this unconcluded legal controversy has been the sentence of the Kenya Appeals Court of May 2000, which stopped the government's imminent resolution to evict the Ogiek from their homeland.

Nevertheless, the authorities insist on trying to force them out of the forest alleging that it is a protected area included in the country's Forest Act. This argument is false for two reasons. From a legal point of view, the Forest Act establishes that indigenous peoples' territorial rights have to be protected. On the ground, what the government is really doing is paving the way for powerful logging companies to enter the Tinet forests, even though it now claims it is a "protected area". The logging ban in force exempts three big logging companies - Pan African Paper Mills, Raiply Timber, and Timsales Ltd. - who are prepared to enter the forests inhabited by the Ogiek.

A group of concerned NGOs - the US-based Digital Freedom Network, the Kenya-based Rights News and Features Service, and the Kenya Land Alliance - launched a campaign in December 2000 to support the Ogiek's fair struggle. February 2001.

Who favours and who destroys forest biodiversity?

Governments should be directly responsible for the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of their respective countries and people. Nevertheless, what frequently happens in the South is that the authorities act in collusion with powerful internal and external interests, and to the

detriment of the country's biodiversity, and thus against the welfare of the population they are supposed to protect. This is what is going on in Kenya.

Located in the east coast of Central Africa, Kenya holds a variety of landscapes: from tropical rainforests in the coastal plains to arid areas in the dry west plateau. Such diversity in nature goes together with the existence of different ethnic groups. Deforestation and desertification are two environmental problems severely affecting the country. Logging - both legally granted by concessions and illegal - an inadequate policy towards protected areas, megaprojects like dams and mining, are all putting at risk the rich biodiversity of Kenya. In the meantime, the government has not only proved to be unable to stop the process, but has also been active in promoting it.

Regarding protected areas it seems that the authorities have not learnt from past mistakes. In the mid-1970s, Massai residents of southern Kenya were abruptly relocated from land that was subsequently enclosed within the Amboseli National Park, one of the continent's most visited wildlife reserves. Deprived of their lands and as a desperate way of showing their protest, the Massai reacted by killing many of Amboseli's most prized tourist attractions, including dozens of leopards, elephants, and rhinos. Both the fauna and indigenous people suffered as a consequence of a mistaken approach with regard to biodiversity conservation.

The announcement made by the government in February 2001, according to which many areas of forest reserves spread all over the country - totalling 67,150 hectares - will be left without legal protection confirms that there is no clear policy for forest biodiversity conservation in Kenya. National environmental NGOs gathered in the Greenbelt have expressed their intention to present a formal objection to the proposed forest excisions, and the Kenya Forests Working Group is organizing an international campaign to oppose it. Severe droughts have affected the Kenyan territory in the last two years. Considering the connection existing between deforestation and the fall in rainfall patterns, the destruction of these forests would aggravate the problem and at the same time be detrimental to the flora and fauna they are home to.

In sum: the answer to the question we have posed regarding biodiversity conservation in Kenya is clear. On one side there are local communities and environmental NGOs trying to protect the country's biodiversity. On the opposite site there are the authorities, transnational companies,

international banks and "developers", whose actions result in its destruction. March 2001.

Pollution and deforestation caused by Pan African Paper Mills

The large-scale monoculture pulpwood plantation model being implemented in the South not only results in negative social and environmental impacts in the forest areas, but has also additional impacts from pollution resulting from the industrial process for the production of pulp as well as deforestation linked to logging for supplying the pulp mill with raw material.

Such is also the case of Pan African Paper Mills (Panpaper), based in Webuye town, in the Western Province, with a population of some 60,000 people. The mill is situated in an environmentally sensitive area on the bank of River Nzoia, which flows into Lake Victoria. It has been denounced that the factory belches out smoke and sludge, polluting air, water, and nearby rivers. So strong has been the impact provoked by this plant, that the iron sheets within Webuye town are rusted, and people passing through the town, on the Nairobi-Kampala Road, have to lock the windows of their vehicles and close their noses until they are well passed the town.

Problems caused by Panpaper in the region are not new. According to a survey performed in 1994, pollution provoked by this mill is believed to be responsible for a number of health problems: more than 60% of the children born after 1974 - when the plant began to operate - have had breathing problems from the age of one to five years. Other health problems verified in Webuye are chronic coughing, flu, nervous disorders, diarrhoea, typhoid and migraine, which health officials attribute largely to the air and water pollution produced by the mill.

At the same time, the mill's wood supply needs constitute a powerful incentive to deforest the remaining forests in the region - Kakamega and Mt. Kenya forests in particular - which are being plundered at alarming rates. Pan African Paper Mills is one of the main buyers of the wood extracted from them. At the same time, the company is one of the three firms that have been exempted from the partial logging ban in force in the country. To the official viewpoint, this step was taken because "the government has shares in it and is important to the economy". The record of Panpaper regarding forest conservation is terrible. From 1972 - when

the mill was built - to the present day, the whole forest cover of the area - as well as that of Turbo and Mosorit, located 200 km far away - has disappeared.

The argument that this is the price to be paid to achieve "development" is no more acceptable nor accepted. As a result, local dwellers and activists have organized themselves in the Panpaper Anti-Pollution Lobby Group, and have organized a protest to stop such abuses. April 2001.

Is the government serious about forest biodiversity conservation?

During the meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the Convention of Biological Diversity held in Montreal, Canada from November 12 to 16 2001, NGOs raised the issue of the contradiction between the Kenyan Government's commitments and actions regarding forest biodiversity conservation.

The fact is that while government delegates were meeting in Montreal to take action to ensure biodiversity conservation, the government of Kenya's recent announcement of its intention to excise over 67,000 hectares of forests showed a clear lack of commitment in that respect. This decision would have severe implications, particularly given the country's critically low forest cover (less than 2% of Kenya's total land area). If implemented, the announced excisions would affect the two largest of the five main water catchment areas of the country: Mount Kenya and the Mau Forests.

In particular, the large proposed excision in the Mau Forest would have complex and grave social and environmental consequences. The government proposes to excise 35,301 hectares of Eastern Mau Forest (54% of the forest reserve); 22,797 hectares of South-western Mau (27% of the forest reserve); and 1,036 hectares of Western Mau forest (only 4.5%, but all forest).

The government is not even taking into account that these forests are not empty. The Ogiek have a right to live in their ancestral home but the government wants to give the land to private individuals rather than conserve it for the benefit of the Ogiek and the entire nation.

These Forest excisions in Kenya will lead to a significant loss of the nation's biodiversity. The South Nandi Forest Reserve shelters a globally-

threatened species, a small bird called Turner's Eremomela. Any further excision of South Nandi forest, however small, will further endanger this bird.

The excision of Eastern Mau Forest will have a devastating impact on the world's largest concentration of flamingoes in Lake Nakuru, which is protected under international law (Ramsar Convention). The Government's plan is to excise almost the entire catchment area of Lake Nakuru, which will lead to major changes in quantity and quality of the water feeding the lake. Lake Nakuru's value as one of Kenya's most popular parks, may disappear with the flamingoes.

Furthermore, the excisions of the Mau Forest will significantly reduce the ability of the forest ecosystem to cope with natural disasters, in particular drought, hence leading to more severe impacts. Drought has affected Kenya since historical times. The latest drought, experienced in 2000, had unprecedented impact on the people of Kenya and the nation's economy, including water and electricity rationing, since 70% of the electricity is produced by hydro-power plants. Several assessment studies have shown that the severity of this impact was associated with past and current destruction of Kenyan forests.

In Mount Kenya, excision of the Sagana II section of the Hombe area will cut off a critical and already-fenced "corridor" used by elephants to migrate from the northern to the southern part of Mount Kenya through the Thigu forest, leading directly to human-wildlife conflict. The repercussions of excising Mt. Kenya forest will also be felt as far as on the mangrove ecosystems of the East-African coast. For instance, the current deforestation in this forest leads to a higher siltation in the Tana River and reduced output in the five hydro-power stations.

The situation described above is by no means an exception. Many other governments that have signed and ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (as Kenya has) continue destroying those same forests they have committed themselves to protect. The question therefore needs to be posed; are the Kenyan and many other governments serious about forest biodiversity conservation? November 2001.

Forest destruction for the benefit of government cronies

Kenya's ecosystems are on the edge, unable to continue providing water, plant materials and other basic human needs to its burgeoning population.

Forests remain on less than two percent of Kenya's land, under protected status as a national resource. In a country plagued by drought, the forests are critical for water conservation. They are also home to indigenous peoples that live by hunting game and gathering food plants, herbs, and honey within the forests.

In a bid for votes, the Kenyan government has rescinded protected status from 4 percent of the remaining forests, claiming that the territory is needed to open settlements for the country's many landless people. However, facts tell quite another thing.

In Kitale, hundreds of squatters vainly wait for the promised 7,234 acres of land hived off Kitalale, Kapolet and Sikhendu forests. In official documents, the squatters are already resettled, having benefited from a process sanctioned by President Moi in a public directive in 1999. But instead of hundreds of huts, magnificent residential homes and well-tended plots dot the once public resource. Among beneficiaries are the chief of a paramilitary unit, a Cabinet minister, several MPs and members of an Ugandan repatriated clique.

The story is replicated in Nandi District. Chepkumia, in South Nandi Forest, is a massive component of Kenya's biodiversity, once part of the Mau Forest. About 2,891 hectares were hived off to resettle 200 families that were forced to move from the neighbouring Koibem forest, by an excision sanctioned in 1999. But instead of resettling them on the entire area, the displaced were distributed on small parcels while the rest of the land was grabbed by well-connected individuals. A coalition of environmental organisations called the Kenya Forests Working Group warns that degradation of the Mau Forest will significantly reduce the ability of the forest ecosystem to cope with drought and will have a devastating impact on water quality and level in Ramsar protected Lake Nakuru, home to the world's largest concentration of flamingoes and Kenya's second most visited tourist site.

Kaptagat Forest, in Keiyo, has been irreversibly destroyed. The canopy of trees that is seen to dot the Eldama Ravine Road is a mere facade. Sawmillers have located their illegal operations along major roads and operate in broad daylight. "Most of the land meant for squatters went to powerful people. The landless, who initially supported the excision, have now realised they were cheated," says Mr Nixon Sifuna, an environmental lawyer who went to court last year to stop alienation of 67,000 hectares of forests and teaches environmental law at Moi University, Eldoret.

Investigations reveal that well-connected grabbers, loggers and charcoal burners have reduced key forests - among them Kaptagat and Kapsaret - to mere patches of trees. Two former Environment Ministers are extensively named as owners of sawmills located deep inside Kapsaret Forest, a few kilometres from Eldoret town.

"It is carpet-cutting of trees," says Mr Daniel Simotwo, an environmental activist who also went to court to stop the excisions. "The destruction (of Kapsaret) is massive; done by loggers." The loggers use Mafia-like operations to terrorise critics. A person was reportedly killed a few months ago during an operation by police to arrest a well-known sawmillier.

Kenyan environmental organisations, the indigenous Ogiek and Global Response, have raised an international outcry against the logging and colonisation scheme, inviting to send letters to urge the Kenyan government to revoke the forest excisions announced in October 19, 2001. February 2002.

Forest degradation and the way ahead for conservation efforts

Environmental degradation seems to have taken a sad toll in Kenya. As many as 12 people were killed in a landslide at Kanyakine, Meru Central District, where deforestation has laid bare hill slopes where trees used to perform the function of holding the soil together. That and other concerns related to environmental degradation has put conservation of forests as one of today's hottest items on the national agenda. Deforestation has been so intense that some people believe that the estimate that only 10 per cent of Kenya's original forest cover remains, is optimistic.

Parallel to this, General Peter Ikenye has been appointed to deal with forest conservation, in what may appear to be a move to appease public concerns. He will have to deal, on the one hand, with the strong clique involved with legal and illegal logging which has led Kenyan forest to depletion, and on the other hand with hundreds of thousands of displaced forest peoples as well as squatters, settlers and landless people who have been forced into the forest out of very poor living conditions.

However, the greatest stumbling block to forest conservation appears to be the lack of political will to save the Kenyan forest and the simple explanation is that the most powerful peoples in this country are also the biggest enemies of its woodland.

Within that context, the Kenyan government will have to identify new mechanisms to protect forests - if it has the political will to do so. Those new mechanisms will necessarily entail some type of symbiotic relationship between forests and neighbouring communities and examples on sustainable management of forests by local communities certainly exist: among others, the Ogiek people can provide a very good example on this.

At the same time, many forest areas need to be restored and in this sense a local journalist points at the right direction by saying that "there is no point in filling our country exclusively with exotic trees", while calling on Environment minister Joseph Kamotho to lead the nation in establishing nurseries of indigenous trees and planting them. The question is: will the Kenyan government apply the prevailing large-scale monoculture alien tree plantation scheme so strongly advocated by corporate economic interests? Or will it take a bold action and promote a genuine reforestation programme with native trees in partnership with local communities? May, 2002.

LIBERIA

World Bank promotes oil palm and rubber plantations in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire

By different means the World Bank is one of the major and most influential promoters of the prevailing monoculture tree plantation model. The International Finance Corporation (IFC) - a part of the World Bank Group, whose specific task is the promotion of private sector investment in "poor" countries - has been directly investing in projects linked to tree plantations, for example in Kenya and Brazil.

The IFC has recently signed two agreements to fund two of these initiatives in West Africa. One of them consists of the reopening of a rubber company in Liberia that was shut down during the civil war, while the other is the set up of an oil palm plantation in Côte d'Ivoire.

The Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) will receive a loan of US\$ 3.5 million to develop a rubber plantation in its 120,000 hectares estate. Between 1961 and 1984 the company had planted rubber there in an area of 10,500 hectares, which was abandoned because of the civil war.

According to its promoters, the project will create jobs, provide health and education, and improve rural infrastructure, benefiting 800 small holders.

The holding company of Côte d'Ivoire's leading producer of rubber - Société des Caoutchoucs de Grand Bereby (SOGB) - will receive a US\$ 6 million IFC loan to establish an oil palm plantation in that country. The plantation will occupy 5,000 hectares and in a second phase of the project the company will build a crude palm oil factory to process its production. It has been underscored that the new plantations will avoid areas of secondary rainforest, which SOGB has guaranteed to protect. SOGB already operates a 15,000 hectare rubber plantation and processes rubber, mainly for export.

The globalization of the plantation model is a reality, also regarding rubber and oil palm production. The Compagnie Internationale de Cultures (Intercultures), an affiliate of Societe Financiere des Caoutchoucs (SOCFINAL S.A.), owns 75% of the Liberian Agricultural Company. SOCFINAL is a Luxembourg holding company with agricultural, real estate, banking, and financial interests, and major holdings in oil palm and rubber not only in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, but also in Indonesia, Malaysia, Cameroon and Nigeria. In the rubber production project in Liberia also participates PROPARCO, the private sector lending arm of the French development agency Agence Francaise de Developpement. At the same time both Intercultures and PROPARCO are shareholders in SOGB.

Mr. Tei Mante, Director of IFC's Agribusiness Department, said that both agreements would lead to more employment and higher living standards, that they will promote exports that will earn foreign currency, while supporting agricultural production with maximum sensitivity to the environment. Everything sounds incredibly nice ... but the problem is that reality shows a completely different situation. Promises of a higher quality of life for local dwellers, an improvement of poor countries' economies, the respect for the environment, etc. are in blatant contradiction with the negative consequences on people and the environment that similar projects based on vast tree monocultures bring about with them. The few and poor quality jobs that such projects create seldom improve local peoples' quality of life and the environmental impacts that large-scale tree monocultures entail result in further impoverishment of local populations. If the World Bank is really willing to fulfil its mandate of poverty alleviation, then it should begin to reorient its loans to investments which create better

employment opportunities than those generated by this type of plantations. December 1999.

The silent destruction of the forests

Seldom are there news arriving from Liberia. This country, located in the West African region, with shores on the Atlantic Ocean and bounded in the West by Sierra Leone, Guinea in the North and Ivory Coast in the East, ranks amongst the world's poorest countries and bears the weight of a huge foreign debt. An accelerated process of environmental degradation - including forests - is also affecting the country. Several activities - as mining, plantations and logging - are destroying the dense tropical rainforests.

Some of the multinational companies involved in this destruction have been operating for long time, while others arrived during the last few years. Their subsequent onslaught has intensified the unsustainable and reckless exploitation of the country's natural resources, already affected by loss of biodiversity and soil erosion.

The Liberian-American-Swedish Company (LAMCO) is a joint venture that has been mining and exporting iron ore from Liberia for more than three decades. The company suspended its operations in the '90s due to civil war. LAMCO is responsible for large-scale deforestation as a result of its opencast mining methods, railway construction for the transportation of the ores and setting up miners' camps.

Rubber plantations are another direct cause of deforestation. Firestone Rubber Plantations, the world's largest rubber plantation company, originally owned by the American Firestone and now in the hands of the Japanese Bridgestone, has caused large-scale deforestation as well as the pollution of the Farmington River and several creeks relied upon by rural communities for drinking and fishing. Additionally, thousands of peasants were forced to migrate to work in these plantations and their communities condemned to poverty. The Liberia Agriculture Company (LAC), which is the second largest rubber plantation company in the country, operating in the Gran Bassa county, is also to be blamed for deforestation at a big scale. Additionally, the company has been at the centre of controversies for years, with allegations ranging from abuse of workers' rights - including child labour in hazardous tasks - to tampering with Justice. In January 1999 riots occurred when about one thousand

angry workers who protested in front of their managers were violently repressed.

One of the recent arrivals is the Malaysian-owned Oriental Timber Company (OTC), closely related to the President himself, which will have exclusive rights over the last remaining closed canopy tropical rainforest within the so called upper Guinea Forests. This region is the habitat of several endangered and some endemic species. These high forests, that are either sacred for local people, proposed for game/forest reserves or as national parks, still remain unprotected. Additionally, OTC will set up a timber processing plant, will manage one of the two major seaports in Liberia and will also be granted governmental contracts to build roads into its operational area. This company has also got a bad record abroad: it previously caused environmental damages in Guyana and in the Congo Democratic Republic, while was denied an operation license in Ghana before moving to Liberia. According to Mr. Eric Passawee, President of the Liberian Loggers Association, OTC " ...makes the state and people vulnerable to environmental threats...". He also stated that the company operates under the protection of the country's President.

The initiative "Action Now!" recently launched by the Save My Future (SAMFU) Foundation to counteract this dangerous state of affairs, aims at creating awareness and supporting the struggle of grassroots organizations and communities to protect the country's resources. January 2000.

Concerns over World Bank's promotion of rubber plantations

The US\$ 3.5 million loan that the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group is about to award to the Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) to develop a rubber plantation of 120,000 hectares in the Grand Bassa county is provoking growing concern in Liberia. The project is aimed at restarting operations and initiating a rehabilitation program of the plantation, which had been abandoned because of the civil war that affected the country between 1989 and 1997.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), that will be performed by an IFC team which has recently arrived to the country is not a guarantee that social and environmental consequences of the project - as well as LAC's negative background in the area - will be taken into account. On the contrary, Liberian environmentalists consider that the decision has already

been taken, and that the EIA will become just a formality to appease their claims.

Concerns are based not only on the false promises that LAC has formulated in relation to the development of the area, but also on the project itself. In fact, LAC has on previous occasions failed to live up to expectations of fair wages for its workers, education for their children, and health and decent housing. After three decades of LAC's presence in the area, schools in the company's estate could operate only thanks to the assistance provided by Catholic Church members, while workers still dwell in over-crowded concentration camp style housing units that are presently almost in ruins. In the meantime, the company's business has thrived.

Several dark points of the project are also worrying. For example, there is no mention that part of the area to be planted is occupied by forests, from which the company will extract timber. The substitution of forests by rubber monocultures in such a big area will certainly generate negative environmental impacts. In spite of this, the project ignores that logging will be a major component of the initiative and this is considered to be a manoeuvre by LAC to avoid a full-scale EIA.

Additionally, the fate of traditional communities situated in the concession area has never been properly addressed. LAC has said that "there is no settlement within the areas identified for new rubber plantations... but there are small numbers of shifting cultivators". This seems to imply that, being few and "shifting" they don't constitute settlements and therefore can be ignored. LAC's promise that there will be no resettlement or displacement of local communities because of economic reasons is not credible. As stated recently by a local environmentalist: "Encircling communities with rubber trees so to leave them with no land for farming and the means to meet their other needs for survival, for us, amounts to one command: move or perish!"

The World Bank is currently performing a review of the implementation of its 1991 Forestry. This is a good opportunity to carry out a review of these types of projects - that the Bank continues to support - and to see if they are really in line with the Bank's mandate of poverty alleviation and sustainable development, or if they are at odds with social justice and environmental sustainability. March 2000.

Civil war and transnational profit making

During the first years of the 1990s Liberia was the scenario of a civil war which left 150,000 fatal victims and one million people displaced or leaving the country as refugees. From January to November 1996 the war was triggered again until finally presidential elections took place in 1997. Governments of neighbouring countries, as well as European governments and companies -particularly Belgian and French- were involved in the delivery of weapons to the different groups engaged in the conflict, in exchange for gold, diamonds and roundwood.

France provided the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) with guns and received precious tropical roundwood in exchange. The government of Ivory Coast also helped the NPFL, and obtained the benefit of mining and forest concessions. The total value of illegal wood exports from the areas controlled by the different armed groups in conflict reached US\$ 53 million a year. During the Liberian civil war period, the import of tropical roundwood from Liberia in Spain increased considerably, and since 1997 the flux has restarted. Greenpeace-Spain has recently denounced that the country's consumption of Liberian tropical roundwood is promoting social and environmental destruction in that country.

War is now apparently over, but the usual vultures are ready to continue profiting in its aftermath. Transnational logging companies - such as LAMCO (USA-Sweden), Bridgestone (Japan), and Oriental Timber Company (Malaysia) - are targeting Liberia, where 35% of the rainforests still remain untouched. In spite of the government's declared intention of "minimizing forest destruction and promoting sustainable forest management", the economic and political power of foreign governments and companies, coupled with a national economy in shambles as a result of civil war, pose an important threat to their survival. And what needs to be stressed is that those same powerful governments, which appear as committed promoters of tropical forest conservation in international fora, are the ones which are most eager to profit from the destruction of Liberia's forests. April 2000.

At the centre of it all is the indigenous community

Liberia hosts the last two significant blocks of the remaining closed canopy tropical rainforest within the upper Guinea Forests of West Africa, which spans Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. The

original extent of tropical rainforest in the region is estimated at 727,900km², but has shrunk to about 92,797km² - about 12.7% of its original size! Liberian forests account for 44.5% of the remaining 92,797km² followed by Cote d'Ivoire with 29.1%.

Liberia's rainforest is of incalculable value to the sub-region given the poor state of the remaining tracts of forest in all of humid West Africa. The forest hosts numerous endemic species and many others that are virtually extinct elsewhere in the region. It supports hundreds of species of birds, nine of which including the white-breasted guinea fowl (*Agelastes meagrdis*) are endangered, large amounts of endemic fauna and flora and is a unique habitat for some of the rarest species in the world. The Jentink's duiker (the rarest in the world), pygmy hippopotamus (*Cherosis liberensis*), Liberian mongoose (*Liberictis kuhni*), several dozens of reptiles, including three types of crocodiles and at least eight poisonous snakes, inhabit Liberia's forests. Although there has been no recent scientific survey of the forest, it is believed to abound with more than two thousand different types of flowering plants - 240 of which accounts for valuable timber species and hundreds with medicinal values. The fauna and flora of this region are distinct and conservation of its biological diversity is recognized as a global priority.

Liberia is recovering from a savage civil war that left its economy and much of its infrastructures in ruins. Unemployment is high and more than 75% of the citizenry live in abject poverty. The country owes international lenders an estimated US\$ 3 billion dollars and has not benefited much from international since of the war ended in 1997. Also corrupt government officials squander most of the little aid trickling in. The government has turned to the forest, which is now its second largest foreign exchange earner next to the maritime programme.

Pressure on the Liberian forest has intensified in the last few years, primarily due to an upsurge in logging activities. Although other factors mitigate the problem of deforestation in Liberia, logging and agricultural expansion pose the gravest threat to our rainforest. Almost every significant national forest land, including areas previously designated as national parks or forest reserves, has been granted as concessions to logging companies who operate with virtually no monitoring from the forestry authorities. Logging operations have reached an unprecedented proportion, with approximately 60% of the country's forests now severely degraded. The country's biodiversity is further threatened because

deforestation has effectively separated the two blocks of the rain forest further jeopardizing its overall ecological integrity.

The loss of the forest is taking a serious toll on nature here. The animal population is noticeably declining with the loss of forest cover. The pygmy hippopotamus, elephant, leopard, etc. are almost extinct. Rare sightings by villagers are often difficult to confirm, as the surviving population seems to be always on the move in search of dense forest regions.

Not only log extraction and harvesting practices are disturbing the forest. Roads constructed by logging companies into once remote forest regions make movement of hunters easier thus exposing already endangered species to further threat. The bush meat trade is flourishing with all its negative consequences for the country's biodiversity.

The logging companies are not the only people responsible for the destruction of our rainforests. Western consumers, especially Europeans, are as guilty as the companies themselves. They provide the money and market that keeps the trade in Liberian timber alive. In 1999 Europe, the traditional importers of Liberian timber, imported 155,559.639m³ of log about 82% of the total logs export. France imported 37%, followed by Italy 19% and Turkey 15%. The port city of Bordeaux (France) is recorded as destination of the largest percentage of Liberian timber. Spain and Portugal also imported Liberian timber during the period.

In the first six months of 2000 there was a sharp increase in the production of round logs. The 679,352.376m³ recorded by the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) for the period far exceeded the total production of 596,355.116m³ recorded for the preceding four years from January 1996 to December 1999. During this period the Asia imported 49.4% of Liberia's export while 38.4% went to Europe. France alone imported 17.9% of the round logs and 51.4% of sawn timber exported from Liberia.

About sixty species of trees are currently being harvested in Liberia. Ten of these sixty species constituted about 65.4% of the total export. Ekki (*Lophira alata*), known locally as ironwood and used mostly for bridge and house construction by the rural people, was heavily exploited accounting for approximately 20% of the total production. Niangon (*Heritiera utilis*) was second constituting about 13% and Abura (*Mitragyna ciliata*) with 7%.

The World Bank is arguably the pioneer of deforestation in Liberia; a situation the bank is yet to acknowledge. In the 1970's and early 80's the bank financed agricultural projects such as cocoa, coffee and oil

plantations that did little to alleviate poverty but did more to destroy the rich tropical rainforest mostly intact then. One of the projects, the Bong County Agricultural Development Project induced a massive shift from food to cash crop production undermining the national government's drive for self-sufficiency in food production.

Again in 1999 the International Finance Corporation (IFC) - the private lending arm of the World Bank, granted the Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) a US\$ 3.5 million loan to ostensibly upgrade and expand its rubber plantations in rural Liberia. Large tracts of primary and secondary forests have been cleared and is being planted with rubber, despite protest from local environmentalists. The bank argued that the area earmarked for the expansion was mostly broken forest and therefore not covered by the bank's own policy which forbids investing in projects that would lead to conversion of primary forest. Perhaps the bank chooses to ignore or it is ignorant of the fact that when the companies abandon the plantation due to low yield or other factors, charcoal miners move in. The rubber trees are felled and burned to produce charcoal leaving behind hundreds of acres of empty fields and wasteland.

The forest is the life-line of the indigenous communities, the people rely on it for their livelihood. The forest provides shelter for their cultural and religious practices including shrines, traditional bush schools, cover for the streams, medicinal herbs, farmland, etc. It also provides them means of self-employment and income for sustainable livelihood with trade in arts and craft accounting for more than 40% of their earnings.

Conversant of the need for sustainable forest exploitation, indigenous people practiced nature conservation for centuries. Hunting and farming in some dense forests was prohibited and fishing restricted to certain portions of the rivers. Individual fishing in communal streams was discouraged and fish was harvested once a year during the dry season. Felling trees of cultural or spiritual value is considered a taboo. The hunting of certain animals including leopards and tigers was strictly forbidden.

The loss of the forest has not only limited the people's ability to feed themselves and lead healthy lives, it has effectively undermined the authority of their social structures. The traditional bush school hosted only in high forest is dying fast. Societies such as the Poro and Sande also usually headquartered in dense forest have almost disappeared completely. All of these institutions promoted unity and love in the community, instilled discipline into the youths and ensured strict

adherence to moral standards set by the society as well as enforce law and resolving conflicts. A situation that is causing despair and apprehension in our communities.

Whither we go from here, is no longer a point of speculation. The reality of the danger ahead is looming larger than life itself. By: Silas Siankor. March 2001.

Forest destruction backed by the government

Liberia hosts the last two significant blocks of the remaining closed canopy tropical rainforest within what is known as the upper Guinea Forests of West Africa, which spans Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. The original extent of tropical rainforest in the upper Guinea forest is estimated at 727,900km², but has shrunk to about 92,797km², which represents only 12.7% of its original size. Liberian forests account for 44.5% of the remaining 92,797km² followed by Cote d'Ivoire with 29.1%. This region holds a rich biodiversity, with over 2000 species of plants of which 240 are valuable timber species.

In the case of Liberia, the deforestation process is the result of the greed of international logging companies that invaded the country in the last decade, coupled with the attitude of the Liberian government that promotes their activities. Almost every significant national forest land, including areas previously designated as national parks or forest reserves, has been granted as concessions to logging companies, while those yet not granted are being encroached upon by various other companies. Monitoring and regulation by the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) exist only on paper. Logging operations have reached an unprecedented proportion, with approximately 60% of the country's forests now severely degraded. The country's biodiversity and the livelihoods of rural communities are further threatened, because deforestation has effectively separated the northern/northwestern and eastern/southeastern portions of the rainforest.

In January 2000 the government announced it was cancelling all concession agreements and that only applications for concessions of more than 300,000 acres would be granted. While the FDA insisted that this new measure was aimed at maximizing national income and promoting the sustainable utilization of the forest, it is now apparent that the actual motive was to grant larger concessions to few foreign giant

logging companies. This is proven by the fact that areas seized from smaller companies were immediately redistributed amongst giant companies.

Even though there is very little difference in the modus operandi of the logging companies, the case of Oriental Timber Company (OTC) is paradigmatic. In the 1990s, during the Liberian civil war, a Dutch businessman - Mr. Gus van Kouwenhaven, known in the official circles as "Gus" and closely connected to Charles Taylor, who would become President of the country - succeeded in acquiring several concessions in southeastern Liberia, - a significant portion of the forest block stretching from Grand Bassa through River Cess and into Sinoe County. Even though the agreement was kept in secret, the concession's present size is estimated to range between 900,000 hectares and 1.44 million hectares. In 1999 a Malaysian company registered in Liberia as the Oriental Timber Company (OTC) and - surprisingly enough - had "Gus" as its president. In addition to its logging operations, OTC manages the port of Buchanan and upgraded the road connecting the ports of Buchanan and Greenville, originally constructed by "Gus" during the Liberian war to transport logs.

The OTC agreement has been and still is subject of much speculation and criticism. Ownership of the OTC is yet somewhat uncertain, and while some believe that the Indonesian Djan Djanti Group is the OTC's parent company in Asia, others point at the Hong Kong-based Global Star Group.

No environmental impact assessment was ever carried out regarding its logging activities. Clearcutting is practised in vast areas using more than 140 assorted caterpillars/bulldozers and about 75 trailers which work seven days a week, day and night, each trailer making at least two daily trips to the port of Buchanan to deliver logs. Given the speed at which OTC operates, a realistic estimate of log extraction can be put within the range of 2500 - 3000m³ of logs/day, or 75,000m³ - 90,000m³/month. These practices are in flagrant violation of established FDA regulations.

All OTC production is exported as round logs. According to OTC Director Joseph Wong, the company exports some 60,000-70,000 m³ per month to southeast Asia to supply its plywood factories. This comes to 720,000-840,000 m³ per year. The excess production is sold in the port of Buchanan to buyers mostly for export to Europe - France and Spain being the most frequently cited.

As usually happens, the arrival of OTC to the region was trumpeted as something positive because it would result in the creation of thousands of

new jobs and in the building of roads, hospitals and schools to assist rural dwellers. Nevertheless, residents of rural communities where OTC operates complain of numerous abuses, among which the destruction of houses, crops and sacred forests belonging to local communities. At the same time, local dwellers have in several instances been subjected to harassment, intimidation and even unlawful detention by officers of the OTC's militia. Some 600 Asian labourers (mostly from the Indonesian island of Sumatra) have been imported and were all given free work permits. All skilled jobs are operated by Asians with reportedly few going to Liberians. Only unskilled jobs at the port, or spotters and chainsaw operators in the forest are reserved for Liberians.

All the above proves that OTC and the Liberian government are close partners and this partnership is enhanced by the controversial Strategic Commodity Act, whereby the President can declare any of the country's natural resources - from forests to mines - as a "strategic commodity". He has the sole power to execute, negotiate and conclude all commercial contracts or agreements with any foreign or domestic investors for the exploitation of any of those commodities. In one of the most high profile incidences, President Taylor dismissed Grand Bassa county's Superintendent when he criticized the OTC and threatened to arrest its top management for failing to respond to complaints against the company by locals. In another incident, the president granted the OTC permission to log 114,935 hectares of forest which had been designated to be used by the University of Liberia for scientific studies and research purposes only.

The result of this de facto "joint-venture" between the private and the public sector is apparent: it is OTC and a reduced group of officials who win, while Liberian forests and people continue to lose. April 2001.

Danish firm DLH violates its own principles on wood purchasing

Environmental and human rights organizations have recently sent an open letter to Danish timber trade corporation Dalhoff Larsen & Horneman A/S (DLH Group), calling it to stop dealing with Liberian logging companies which, besides being responsible for the serious process of deforestation that has been occurring during the last decade in Liberia, have been also found involved - according to a United Nations report - in a number of illegal activities both in Liberia and in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The forests of Liberia constitute one of last remaining blocks of closed canopy tropical rainforest, a vital part of the Upper Guinea Forest of West Africa and one of the most threatened biodiversity hotspots in the world. These forests, which contain over 2000 species of plants, of which 240 are valuable timber species, have been devastated during the past decade as the result of the greed of international logging companies that invaded the country, coupled with the attitude of the Liberian government, that promotes their activities. As a result, the livelihoods of rural communities are now further threatened, as deforestation has separated portions of rainforest, while the activities of the logging companies have caused the destruction of houses, crops and sacred forests.

The UN report provides abundant evidence about the interrelationship between the timber industry and a number of illegal activities. Two of the major timber companies are Oriental Timber Company (OTC) and the Royal Timber Corporation (RTC) and both are commercially related with DLH.

Some of the illegal activities detailed in the UN report are linked to Gus van Kouwenhoven, a member of President Taylor's inner circle and "responsible for the logistical aspects of many of the arms deals." Van Kouwenhoven is directly involved in RTC and OTC (as general manager in the former and chairman in the latter) and through OTC he "organizes the transfer of weaponry from Monrovia into Sierra Leone". The report also states that "van Kouwenhoven, linked to Liberia's timber industry, provides a large amount of unrecorded extrabudgetary income to President Taylor for unspecified purposes." Incredibly enough, van Kouwenhoven is also on the board of the Liberian Forestry Development Authority (FDA), the government body assigned to monitor and document forest practices and exports.

The timber industry has not only been involved in illegal arms and diamond's trafficking but has also, according to the United Nations report, supported Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), that together with a group of military overthrew the country's elected President in May 1997. The report found "unequivocal and overwhelming evidence" that Liberia has been actively supporting the RUF at all levels and that roads built and maintained for timber extraction are also conveniently used for weapons movement within Liberia, and for the onward shipment of weapons to Sierra Leone.

The above findings should be sufficient to make DLH revise its purchasing policy in Liberia, particularly because the company claims to have "a good

knowledge of the origin (raw material) of the timber products traded." In this case, there are two possibilities: either the company does not have this good knowledge or it knows and does not care. In both cases, it would be violating its own stated principles. If it is true that for DLH "the existence of sustainably managed forests is a long-term commercial prerequisite" and if the company truly feels that it "has a public role to play in the preservation of world forests", then it should act accordingly and dissociate itself from logging in Liberia and embrace the UN report's recommendation of establishing "a temporary embargo on Liberian timber exports, until Liberia demonstrates convincingly that it is no longer involved in the trafficking of arms to, or diamonds from, Sierra Leone. July 2001.

The long chain of responsibility in forest destruction

Liberia is a biodiversity rich country with rocky cliffs and lagoons facing the Atlantic Ocean, with plains covered by forests and savannahs, and rainforests in the highlands, crossed by rapids and waterfalls, all of which are home to the Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, and Bella peoples. The evergreen and semi-deciduous rainforests of Liberia also harbour many and even rare and unique plant and animal species.

Despite all its wealth, Liberia is an impoverished country, burdened by a large external debt. As such it has been conditioned to follow the path of so many other southern countries: to sell its resources. Nature has become a commodity and as such is being not used but abused along the lines of market demand: forests are now Liberia's second largest foreign exchange earner.

Forest clearance by caterpillars and bulldozers to "prepare" the field for cocoa, coffee, rubber and oil palm plantations; mining for gold, diamonds or iron ore usually using open cast polluting methods; road building to access commercially valuable trees; logging and deforestation; are the activities through which forests are being siphoned to meet consumerist demand mainly in European and US markets, where high living standards allow people to indulge in luxurious whims. Big corporations through concessions and even encroachment, implement the destruction.

Recently, a Greenpeace action has put on the table the Liberian issue, denouncing Greek Shelman company of being one of the gateways into

the European Union for imports of West African timber. Greenpeace activists boarded the company's vessel to find logs suspicious of coming from the notorious Malaysian Oriental Timber Company (OTC), which controls the Liberian port of Buchanan. OTC is accused of corruption, illegal logging and participation in the cross-border arms trade that has fuelled the civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone. Shelman boasts on its website of being "a world leader in African wood products" for hardwood flooring made of valuable species including mahogany, iroko, aniegre, limba, and denies knowingly buying from OTC, but declined to make any comments on Greenpeace's accusation.

Liberian forests are being depleted, and there is more than one responsible for that. It's not only the government seeking cash, but also those at the final end of those goods - Northern consumers - and in between, the trade companies and the financial sources providing funds for the whole process.

When talking of forest conservation at international conferences, will all the involved countries - from Liberia and Sierra Leone to Europe and the US - take on their share of responsibility and agree to take the necessary steps to address the issue? May 2002.

MADAGASCAR

Communities defend rainforests against Rio Tinto

Anglo-Australian mining giant Rio Tinto has been frequently denounced for its depredatory activities against forests and local villagers in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and South Africa. Now Rio Tinto has set its sights in rainforests of Madagascar, one of the megabiodiverse countries in the world, due to its situation in the tropical zone and to the fact of being a big island. Local villagers are strongly opposing the company's plans to mine for titanium, a mineral used to make hardened steel, on the Southeast coast of the country despite the company's efforts to woo the community.

Qit-Fer Madagascar Minerals, a Rio Tinto subsidiary, first proposed to mine the 40 kilometres of coastal dunes that cover the villages of Petricky, Mandena and St Luce in 1986. Since then the project has faced significant opposition from the communities and environmentalists because the mine would deforest the area. Even the World Bank, which had been asked to finance the project, pulled out in 1992 as a result of the

findings of an environmental impact assessment carried out by a consulting firm hired by Qit-Fer.

Facing a vigorous international campaign against the mine led by Friends of the Earth, Qit-Fer has spent five months conducting a so called "consultation" process with the 120 communities who live in the area of the mine. Nevertheless such consultation did not actually take place. The company just provided large dinner feasts for the meetings and displayed models of dredging machines, but the devastating impacts of similar Rio Tinto mines in several countries were not mentioned or shown.

Local people reacted to such manoeuvres: "We have seen pictures of the dredging machine and you won't be able to recreate Petricky for a long time after that. What wood will we use for the next 47 years?" said a Lovarhano villager. "Petricky existed before the existence of the people, it is sacred land. The forest of Petricky is our mother. If you cut it down we will have nothing" said one man in Ambovo. Since part of the mining project includes a huge industrial port at Evatra which is situated on a pristine river mouth, Evatra's leader, Ludovic denounced that if the port is built "the sea won't be able to get through to the river and we won't be able to fish".

Regarding employment, community members are also worried about the company's recent statement that all but 350 jobs would be filled by skilled foreign engineers and technicians for the 40 year duration of the project. The additional 3000 jobs required at the start of the project will not necessarily go to local people. The company has failed to discuss other alternative sustainable economic practices based on the local management of natural resources, forests included. April 1999.

Mangrove importance and threats

Located to the East of Africa, Madagascar is the largest island in the Indian Ocean and its fauna and flora are highly endemic. Mangrove forests cover an area of 327,000 hectares, composed of seven tree species accompanied by an extremely diverse fauna.

The Baly Bay case is useful to understand the situation of mangroves in this country. The Baly Bay is located to the west coast of Madagascar. In 1997, 69,350 hectares were classified as a National Park, but including less than 500 hectares of mangroves, which in the region comprise a total of 7,200 hectares. Many species of animals use this habitat as nesting,

roosting and feeding areas. Among the nine threatened and endemic Madagascar waterbirds species, five are recorded inside the mangrove (*Ardea humbloti*, *Anas bernieri*, *Threskiornis bernieri*, *Haliaeetus vociferoides* and *Charadrius thoracicus*). For mammals, two species are recorded inside the bay as the Madagascar bat *Pteropus rufus*, roosting on mangrove trees and *Delphinus sp.* In addition, mangroves constitute an important habitat for invertebrates. The most economically important is the crab *Scylla serrata* and two shrimp species: *Penaeus indicus* and *P. monodon*.

Those mangroves are an important source of income, not only for the country but also for the local population. The mangrove trees are used in building and to a lesser extent as firewood. The traditional and industrial fishing activities are practised inside the bay mainly based on the two shrimp species. The collection of crabs is carried out all year round to feed the local needs. The local population has for many years been involved in these activities, which have resulted in very low impacts on the ecosystem.

In recent years, shrimp has become one of Madagascar's main exported sea products. As a result, the Baly Bay region has become involved in this new tendency by establishing 600 hectares of a semi-intensive shrimp farming industry since 1998.

Compared to others ecosystem types (e.g. forests, lakes), mangroves are one of the less studied habitats in Madagascar, while the increase of the communities' needs and especially the development of shrimp farming are at a critical level. Although the impacts of these activities on mangroves are still difficult to identify due to lack of information, fishermen using traditional methods recorded that the proportion of catches of the two shrimp species (*Penaeus monodon* and *P. indicus*) jumped from less than 1/10 before 1998 to 1/4 in 2000. The causes of this change and other unexpected effects need to be identified and addressed to limit their impacts on biodiversity.

In Madagascar, the exploitation of mangroves for shrimp farming has increased considerably during the last ten years. At the same time, the strong demographic growth in the Malagasy western area may accentuate the ecosystem's degradation, thus simultaneously threatening biodiversity and the riparian community's livelihoods. Studies should be conducted to improve understanding of the relationship between exploitation and biodiversity conservation in order to avoid ecological disasters. Actions such as the ecological monitoring carried out in the Baly Bay region in

2000, require strong collaboration between the company, local communities, academia and relevant authorities, in order to achieve the conservation and sustainable use of resources. The reinforcement of the applied Malagasy decree related to the compatibility of investments with the environment (MECIE), followed by the implementation of ecological monitoring in areas under strong exploitation are essential. In addition, the prioritisation of research programmes should be focused on understanding the ecosystem's functioning as the starting point to achieve conservation. October 2001.

IMF opens up the country to mining

Called the "naturalist's promised land" by French explorer Phillippe de Commerson in 1771, Madagascar is one of the most ecologically rich countries in the world. Twelve thousand species are found on the island the size of Texas; 80 percent are endemic, existing nowhere else. Nine new species of lemur were recently discovered in Madagascar, placing the country only behind Brazil in the number of primates that call it home.

In 1996, the Malagasy government accepted a three-year, US\$ 118 million loan and bowed to IMF pressure in their agreement to further liberalise trade policies and open its economy to foreign investment. Among the measures adopted were allowing foreigners to own land and eliminating export taxes.

The liberalisation of Madagascar's trade and investment policies has encouraged the pursuit of mining plans by a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, a London-based mining company. Ranking as the world's largest mining company, Rio Tinto has an abysmal track record of environmental and human rights violations, stretching from Indonesia to South Africa (under apartheid) to Brazil.

The controversial "Mineral Sands Project" would involve the extraction of ilmenite, which is processed into titanium dioxide, used to produce a white pigment for paint, plastics, and other products. Extracting an estimated 350,000 to 700,000 tons of ilmenite each year, the mine would yield between US\$ 25 million and US\$ 50 million annually.

If the mine is approved, it would cover an expansive 15,000 acres and stretch along 40 miles of coastline. The site for the proposed mine includes more than two-thirds of the unique littoral forests that exist on Madagascar's south-eastern coast. The plant diversity of the mining area

is high, including 16 species that exist only where the mining would occur. These species face potential extinction if the mine moves forward; also threatened is the brown collared lemur, which is locally endemic.

Several actions by the company and the government indicate that the mine will be approved. In 1998, the Malagasy government agreed to reduce the tax rate on the proposed Mineral Sands Project to two percent from the standard five percent rate. The Rio Tinto corporation has already spent at least US\$ 30 million assessing the mineral deposits, and has undertaken an extensive environmental impact assessment. The Malagasy government has agreed to make its decision whether to grant or withhold approval by December of 2001, once Rio Tinto has completed their environmental assessment. By: Jason Tockman. January 2002.

IMF-promoted mining threatens littoral forests

Madagascar is considered as the world's 11th poorest country and one its top 3 biodiversity hotspots. Originally inhabited by different groups of mixed Asian and African origin who lived on its resources through hunting, herding and "tavy" (shifting) agriculture, in the "way of the ancestors", it was colonised by the Europeans in the 16th century, and became a French colony in the 19th century.

The country suffered huge environmental losses through logging of primary species-rich rainforests used for railroad construction and timber exports; major forest clearance of the most fertile areas was carried out for cash-crops, mainly coffee plantations.

During colonial times, the French implemented so-called "reforestation" activities, based on pines and eucalyptus plantations. They also set up the first national parks for wildlife preservation, but these had damaging social, and ultimately environmental, consequences. The local Malagasy being defined as inferior and incompetent, the parks were managed by colonials - who would often lined their pockets through illegal logging. With a narrow protection approach, locals were thus simply deprived of their traditional means of subsistence, generating extreme hardship, resentment and leading to more intense "tavy" cultivation for subsistence elsewhere. The French banned "tavy", but this backfired as it became a symbol of independence and liberty from colonial rule.

Independence came in 1960, and after failed attempts to improve the country's economic situation, Madagascar finally embraced privatisation

and market liberalisation and was forced by the IMF in the early 1980s to adopt structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) to secure World Bank funding, with detrimental effects.

In the 80's, "natural" disasters of droughts and cyclones swept the Malagasy territory. Carbon emissions from industrialised countries are heavily implicated in global climate change, including increases in the frequency and severity of extreme weather conditions. While the Malagasy practice of "tavy" naturally adds to carbon emissions, its contribution to the global greenhouse effect and thus exacerbation of natural disasters is minimal compared to the fossil fuel emissions of the richer nations.

Madagascar's deforestation has major impacts on its own. The resulting erosion and silting up of rivers facilitates the kind of devastating floods the island experienced in 2000; the flooding, in turn, contaminated water supplies thus worsening the epidemic of cholera still playing havoc across the island.

While its forests are further threatened by western business interests such as mining, IMF pressure continues to open the economy to foreign investment, as through eliminating export taxes. It is along these lines that the government has recently announced its decision to grant an environmental permit to QIT Madagascar Minerals S.A. (QMM) (owned 80% by Rio Tinto and 20% by a Government of Madagascar agency called OMNIS) for its proposed ilmenite mining project in south-eastern Madagascar, in the Autonomous Province of Tulear, near the town of Fort-Dauphin (Tolagnaro).

A report commissioned by Friends of the Earth (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) for presentation to the Malagasy government, underlines the impact of such activity. The mining of the Mandena sector, according to QMM's own data, will destroy 203 hectares of littoral forest. The company's calculations may also go awry should "significant migration to the area occur without proper planning". It confesses in its own Social and Environment Impact Assessment that "it is... difficult to accurately estimate what forest area will remain in Mandena once the mining operations are completed", although "historical trends lead us to believe that the residual forest will have disappeared even before the onset of dredging operations". FOE report found this crucial section of the assessment "unacceptably speculative. It hinges on an unsubstantiated conjecture - indeed the false syllogism - that, without the mine's

conservation components, all the littoral forest will disappear over the next 20 years".

Also Conservation International has denounced that "the mining operation [could cause] a net loss of access to the services and goods on which communities are dependent [from the rainforest]". Crucial supplies of vital resources might be jeopardised, both in quality and quantity.

The company also proposes a new road between Fort Dauphin and Eholá, as an integral component of the regional development plan, omitting to discuss its impact on existing forests and on the local and regional economy which will be thus probably swallowed by the economy market with its notorious impoverishing outcome. February 2002.

MALAWI

Too many people?

Malawi, a country with a total land area of 118.484 sq.kms, is located in Southeast Africa. Its lowlands, which receive heavy rainfall, are covered by grasslands, temperate forests and rainforests, but the country has suffered deforestation at a annual rate of 1.3% (1981/90).

The country has a total population of 9,845,000 inhabitants (1996) and four times more people per square kilometre than Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, of whom four fifths depend on agriculture. On average, each farmer has only one hectare and the estate sector holds only a small portion of the land. Thus the big farmers don't seem to be responsible - as they are in many other places - for most of the deforestation. The population grows 3.2% per year and in many regions farmers have no way to expand their operations except by clearing new areas of forest. Malawi might therefore seem to be a good candidate to prove what many believe to be a main cause of deforestation: population growth.

Nevertheless, the recently published research 'Agricultural Land Expansion and Deforestation in Malawi' by I. Minde, D.Ngugi, J. Luhanga, and G. Kowero presents a broader picture. The authors make it clear that population growth alone cannot fully explain deforestation in Malawi. Using original household survey data from three regions, they show that average farm size grew substantially between 1992 and 1996. Such increase, which put additional pressure on forests, was the result of

government decisions to liberalize maize markets and other agricultural policies and not due to population growth.

According to the authors' findings, Malawi's people clear about 50,000 hectares of forest each year, which implies that each rural family deforests about one hectare every thirty five years. If we compare the deforestation occurring in this "overpopulated" country with the one taking place in a clearly non-overpopulated country such as Brazil, the Malthusian simplistic approach crumbles: only one big cattle rancher can deforest that area in only one or few years.

The conclusion seems to be that generalizations linking deforestation to population growth cannot be made without taking into account all the other variables - internal and external - which may either increase or relieve pressures from forests. Such approach can provide explanations of why very densely populated countries like Japan (332 inhabitants/sq.km), the United Kingdom (238/sq.km) or Germany (230/sq.km) are currently not facing the deforestation process which is occurring in a much less populated country as Malawi (83/sq.km). June 1999.

Forests, health and life

To the reductionist viewpoint of Western silviculture, forests are mainly - if not exclusively - a source of roundwood for industrial purposes. Nevertheless, forests are not only the home for thousands of indigenous people in different regions of the world, but also a rich source of different goods -wood included- and services. Medicinal plants are one of such valuable products which indigenous people use in traditional medical practices. Unluckily, some of them - together with the associated traditional knowledge - are also coveted by multinational pharmaceutical companies, which are actively involved in appropriating them for profit-making.

he accelerated process of deforestation that affects Malawi is also provoking the loss of botanical species with a present or potential medical use. Joseph Gangire, chairman of the National Herbalists Association of Malawi has recently denounced that the future of traditional medicine in the country was menaced by the fast rate of deforestation.

"Cutting down trees aimlessly will make us lose our cultural beliefs in traditional healing" expressed Gangire during a national symposium on

plant genetics celebrated in Lilongwe on January 14th. He also said that there are many diseases afflicting Malawians that cannot be cured by conventional medicine, adding that in many cases patients are discharged from conventional hospitals and referred to traditional healers who go deep into the forests to look for herbs, roots and leaves to cure them. But as forests disappear, the possibility to cure or alleviate the pain of many people in a non expensive and accepted way will also disappear.

There is also the risk of a cultural loss, since, if the present process continues, the elders will not be able to pass on their knowledge to the younger, simply because there will be no more forests and herbs left to practice on.

Even if the links between the health of the forests and human health is not always apparent, the case of Malawi shows that forest conservation is capital for the maintenance of the lives of many people. January 2000.

MALI

The value of biodiversity in a fragile environment

Known by its historical past because of the vast and powerful empire that surprised European visitors in the XIV century, nowadays the Malian territory comprises more than 1,200,000 square kilometres in West Africa, over the Sahara desert in the north, the Sahel grasslands in the centre and the savannah region in the south. In the Sahel, human life as well as that of the flora and fauna follow the Niger River's annual flood cycle, with high water levels between August and November. More plentiful rainfall and water courses - including the Niger River - in the southern region give place to a more lush biodiversity.

With more than 58% of its land desert and another 30% threatened by the continued encroachment of the Sahel, Mali faces desertification and deforestation as two capital environmental problems, both of them strongly related to the loss of biodiversity.

The wide variety of plants and animals from the forests and other ecosystems containing trees - like the savannah - constitute an important component of household food supply. In many villages and small towns, the "hidden harvest" from forests and trees is essential for food security since it provides a number of essential dietary products. For example, the fruit of *Saba senegalensis* is widely eaten in Mali. The failure of the

plantation projects using alien fast growing species in order to mitigate the effects of the drought registered in the decade of 1970, was due to the fact that they did not recognise that for many rural people the non-timber forest products are important to their social and economic survival. Thus they preferred native species to alien ones, no matter how fast they could grow.

Forests and trees contribute also indirectly to food security because they have a major role in the sustainability of agricultural production systems by providing, for example, nitrogen to the soil as in the case of leguminous species. This is the case of an agroforestry system adopted in Mali, with millet cultivation under *Acacia albida*.

The meat of wild animals - from mammals to insects - that are hunted or collected in the forests for food, known as bushmeat, is an important source of animal protein in both rural and urban households. Many communities still depend on wild animals and their products, used alone or with herbs, for medication and the treatment of a wide variety of diseases.

The use of wildlife as a food resource is controversial. To the official viewpoint the decline of wildlife in many parts of the country results from increasing population and the associated demand for land for agriculture and human settlement. Nevertheless such simplistic approach ignores the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. Nowadays the necessity of integrating the needs of local people into the management of wildlife resources and biodiversity is accepted as the only way to ensure conservation.

A similar situation is occurring with regards to firewood. A study conducted in 2000 by Mali's National Energy Bureau concluded that firewood accounts for nearly 100% of the country's domestic fuel needs, which - according to the study - would mean that each year more than 464,285 hectares of land would have to be deforested for energy supply purposes. However, taking into account recent studies in Africa, which prove that firewood use is not - as previously believed - a major cause of deforestation, the conclusions of the above study should be subject to further scrutiny.

Mistaken policies like those adopted in the past to conserve the forests in Mali, based on the "Blame the poor" approach, need to be avoided. In the mid-1980s an oppressive set of state policies was adopted. The Forest Service implemented a series of draconian restrictions on the use of forest

products by local communities. This step was very unpopular and strongly resisted, since fines exceeded by far the rural per capita income, people were left without an important portion of their livelihoods, and policy implementation was aggressive. At last it had to be abandoned without any positive results. March 2001.

MOZAMBIQUE

Floods that originated in South Africa

After the tragic floods in Mozambique, the time is ripe for people to start asking questions on what went wrong. What turned those floods into an epic disaster? What can be done to reduce the likelihood of it happening again?

David Lindley, national co-ordinator of the Rennies Wetlands Project (RWP) in South Africa, explains that "the cumulative impact of human activities without regard for nature has turned the recent floods from a natural phenomenon into a man-made disaster of epic proportions. Floods are a natural occurrence but nature has lots of checks and balances for preventing them getting out of hand," he points out. "Rivers do not occur in isolation but are part of intricate wetland systems consisting of grassland 'sponges' in the upper catchment areas, to marshes, reedbeds and floodplains in the middle catchment to swamp forests and estuaries at the bottom. These and many other types of wetlands are all linked together by rivers. Grasslands and wetlands are the river's safety valves. Grasslands are incredibly effective at increasing the infiltration of rain runoff into the ground. This reduces surface runoff flowing into rivers and streams during times of high rainfall, and maximises ground water seepage into these areas in the dry periods. When a river floods, wetlands spread out the water, slow it down and absorb it like a sponge, preventing the dangerously high peaks from occurring. It is these peaks which cause most of the damage, such as washing away bridges, and flooding towns." With approximately 50% of South Africa's wetlands destroyed through poor land management, the recurrence of devastating floods can only increase. Unless what's left is sustainably managed.

"What humans have done, in our infinite arrogance and lack of foresight, is to upset the integrity of our wetlands and mess with the dynamics of our rivers," Lindley says. The RWP has surveyed the upper catchment of the Sand River in Mpumalanga, for example, and found that 80% of the

wetlands and most of the grasslands have been tilled for farming or overgrazed. It is no wonder that the Sand River is a raging torrent, if the upper catchment is in such poor condition. In the Northern Province, the same is true for wetlands of the Letaba River, which runs swollen and angry, overloaded with South Africa's greatest and most vital export - top soil. Vast tracts of bushveld have been overgrazed, leaving the soil bare, hard, and vulnerable to sheet erosion and flooding. This sad tale is bound to be true for those tributaries flowing into the flooding Limpopo. All over South Africa, floodwaters often have nowhere safe to go anymore. They cannot sink into the ground or be held back by marshes and floodplains. So they build up to monstrous proportions, wreaking havoc along their path and finally off loading their load of water onto land at the end of the chain - in this case the people of Mozambique. South Africa is externalizing it's cost of poor land management onto it's neighbours. June 2000.

NIGERIA

Nnimmo Bassey imprisoned and released

Nnimmo Bassey, President of Oilwatch Africa, was detained on Sunday 26 October, when returning to Nigeria from the meeting of the International Committee of Oilwatch in Ecuador.

An architect, poet and active defender of human and environmental rights in this country, Nnimmo has been carrying on a persistent denounce of the abuses of oil companies in Nigeria. Although he has been politically active in Nigeria for years, it is only since becoming a high-profile, vocal critic of the oil industry that he has been imprisoned. In June-July 1996 he was imprisoned during 43 days for attempting to attend a West African regional meeting of Friends of the Earth.

Responding to an urgent call of the Oilwatch Network Secretariat, the International Secretariat of the WRM addressed a message to all WRM members and friends, asking to express their solidarity with Nnimmo. At the same time a fax was sent to the Nigerian Ambassador in Buenos Aires, Argentina, expressing our concern for Nnimmo's arrest and asking to be informed about his situation. We later received news that Nnimmo had been released. What follows is the letter where Nnimmo expresses his gratitude to all who supported him in those difficult moments:

"Dear friends,

I write to thank you all for the solidarity shown over my present brush with the wielders of state power here. I was arrested on arrival at the Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos at about 9 pm on Sunday 26th October. I was detained in the airport for the night and transferred to the Head Office of the SSS in Lagos the next morning. All through Monday I was subjected to rigorous interrogations. I spent Monday night in their cell. No talk of convenience in the cell! I regained partial freedom at about 8 pm on Tuesday night, I was allowed out of their center, but with all my luggage held hostage. That included my eye glasses, wedding ring, wrist watch and wallet. I was further interrogated on Wednesday and Thursday. Centred on my involvement in the struggle for a better environment in Nigeria. Centred also on my activism in the Oilwatch network.

I was finally released yesterday [Friday 31st October] at about 12 noon. My luggage was returned to me but my Passport is still being held. This means that my movement is severely restricted. Means my attending the FoEI AGM in Uruguay is quite unlikely.

Where is the liberty? Where my freedom? Our freedom?? I was only able to reunite with my family at about 5 pm yesterday; and this was when I was able to have a change of clothes since I left Quito!!

I have to keep reporting to the SSS and that in itself is dangerous!

That's the price to pay for fighting for an environment suitable for mankind.

That's it for now. Please do not push this matter to the back burners. Keep on the pressure. Nnimmo." November 1997.

WRM "unwittingly subversive"

As a response to a fax sent by the WRM International Secretariat requesting information about Baton Mittee, Nigerian activist arrested in connection with the Ogoni Day, we received the following letter from the Embassy of Nigeria in Buenos Aires:

"Mr. Ricardo Carrere. World Rain Forest Movement.

Re: Arrest of Baton Mittee in connection with Ogoni Day.

1. I am directed to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 28th January '98 on the above subject matter, and to inform you that its contents have been forwarded to appropriate authorities in Nigeria.

2. I am also to draw your attention to the facts that all reports of ill-treatment, torture, isolation and alledged denial of medical attention said to be meted out on detainees (of whatever kind) in Nigeria are not only baseless, but are wild allegations which cannot be substantiated, but only part of a poorly orchestrated campaign aimed at tarnishing the image of Nigeria and exposing its authorities to disrepute. For the avoidance of doubt, prison conditions in Nigeria are in consonance with acceptable international standards, and all prisoners regardless of their crime, are treated humanely.

3. Finally, you should endeavour to authenticate the reports you receive from people whom you know little about, so that your organization does not unwittingly become an instrument for subversiveness.

Sincerely,

A. Yusur for: Chargé d'affaires". February 1998.

Human rights abuses continue

In spite of political changes after the coming to power of the new military government headed by General Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1998 the situation of human rights in Nigeria has not essentially improved. Members of civil society organizations - some of them involved in environmental causes - are frequently victims of abuses by military and police corps. The situation of jailed Nigerian environmentalists and Human Rights activists has provoked grave concern worldwide since the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa in November 1995 in relation to the struggle of the Ogoni people for the defense of their territory against Shell.

On 4 and 23 March 1999 the Nigerian military government announced the release of most of the remaining political prisoners. They included at least 39 prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience held in connection with alleged coup plots. Those who recovered their freedom have corroborated reports by prisoners released earlier and by former government officials that the alleged coup plot was a government fabrication used to imprison influential government critics, journalists and other human rights defenders. Severe cases of torture have been also denounced.

The process has not a clear positive trend. Three environmental activists - Mr Sagbama Owei Okpo, Mr Akpobarelo Didiya and Mr Sea Mum Kuku -

have been in police detention since last March 20. Their supposed "crime" was to have public documents with them. All three are being held in solitary confinement in the cells of the State Investigation and Interrogation Bureau (SIIB) at Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Access to family and friends is denied, as well as that of medical assistance even if their health situation is deteriorating. It has also been denounced that they were subjected to torture, ill-treatment and humiliation while imprisoned.

To the former can be added that the government has not revoked the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, No. 2 of 1984, which allows indefinite detention without charge or trial of those deemed to have threatened the security or the economy of the state. No answer has been given to the questions raised by victims of human rights violations and human rights defenders about responsibility for the deaths in custody of political prisoners and for political killings suspected of being extrajudicial executions by government forces. April 1999.

Threatened mangroves

Thousands of hectares of mangrove forest and fresh water swamps of the Niger Delta, in the Cross River State, will be destroyed by ongoing oil exploitation activities. Responsible for the situation are the companies Moni Polu Nigeria Limited, that in early 1998 started its oil prospections in the area, and Nobles Drilling, which was contracted to start drilling oil wells. By December 1998 about 8 oil wells had been sunk. A 1000 km long pipeline, that will pass through over 25 communities, has also been programmed. In spite of the letters of protest sent by Nigerian environmental NGOs to the firms involved and to the national authorities, the new phase of the project will start without the accomplishment of the required Environmental Impact Assessment.

Oil prospection and exploitation are known worldwide for their negative environmental and social impact at the local level: loss of indigenous peoples' or peasants' lands, health problems, destruction of rainforests, pollution of water sources and air. At a global level, more extraction means more fuel consumption and liberation of CO₂ to the atmosphere, the most relevant gas causing global warming. In the specific case of Nigeria, the military intimidate local populations, burn their houses and even kill the villagers that resist oil related activities in their lands. Several cases of human rights abuses have been denounced, as testified by the

long struggle of the Ogoni people against Shell in Ogoniland and the most recent facts involving Chevron in the Delta State.

Oil industry is a very important factor of mangrove destruction in Nigeria, but not the only one. The Federal Government is suspected of having recently awarded a contract for the dredging of the upper River Niger from Warri to Baro, in the northern region of the country. Since mangroves are fragile forest ecosystems highly dependent on continuous water feeding, this project could gravely affect them, which could bring about the loss of livelihoods for their inhabitants. It is feared that the Niger Delta area, situated downstream of the location of the dredging project, and which has suffered for years much environmental degradation and social conflicts due to the activities of the oil industry, is further compounded with the works to be undertaken.

Nigeria has lost between 70 and 80% of its original forests and nowadays the area of its territory occupied by forests is reduced to 12% even if the entire country is located in the humid tropics. Having the largest population in Africa (115,000,000 inhabitants in 1996) it registers levels of 40% of illiteracy, while GNP per capita is only US\$ 240. The authorities seem to ignore this reality and prefer to devote funds and efforts to megaprojects as the above referred, regardless of the real needs and aspirations of local communities. April 1999.

Oil and violence

Oil exploitation is responsible for the destruction of mangroves, local community displacement and suffering, as well as environmental degradation of water sources and soil in Nigeria. This depredation is usually accompanied by brutal actions against local community members and activists, during which armed corps constitute the executive arm of the companies. The Niger Delta is an area where oil prospection and exploitation are especially active. Environmental destruction and human rights abuses in this region to the hands of Shell and Chevron have been repeatedly denounced.

Last April the Ekebiri communities of the Southern Ijau Local Government Area of Bayelsa were victims of the violence displayed by a group of soldiers, under the control and direction of Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC). Ekebiri is a clan of three communities -Ekibiri I, II, and Opuadoma- with 32 other satellite villages, with an estimated population

of about 10,000 people. NAOC has been responsible for several human rights abuses in the Niger Delta. The company has even been accused by several of its host communities for instigating ethnic clashes amongst them as a way of weakening their resistance.

The events leading to the blood-bath started when the communities demanded from NAOC a compensation for the incessant spillages that have occurred in their territories, since 1969, the last being in 1997, and in which the company refused to pay. At the beginning of 1999 the company went into discussion with the communities but refused to pay the demanded sum. The discussions then broke down and the communities took steps on April 17 to enforce their demand by closing down the company's 2 manifolds in their communities. The following day NAOC took a military escort and reopened the shut manifolds, what was resisted by the villagers. The soldiers then opened fire into two boats, filled with unarmed youths and chiefs of Ekebiri I and II, who were on their way to a meeting with the Commissioner of Police of Bayelsa State. Eyewitnesses said that the shooting lasted for about 40 minutes and the soldiers shot the fleeing youths and chiefs until they landed on their community waterfront. Some were shot dead right on the community water bank while scrambling to run into their community. On hearing the gun shots, the entire villagers ran for their safety and deserted the village. As a result of this brutal action eight people were killed, two chiefs arrested and the boats seized.

The Nigerian Agip Oil Company Ltd. has produced crude oil in this region since 1969, but despite these two decades of oil exploration and generation of huge benefits for the company, the local population has remained poor. And their environment destroyed.

The Niger Delta Human and Environmental Rescue Organization (ND-HERO) is worried over the extent of impunity of Agip in dealing with oil producing communities. Agip is considered the worst company ever regarding environmental degradation and human rights abuses, seconded only by Elf Aquitaine.

ND-HERO demands government to take urgent steps to bring Agip and the soldiers involved in these atrocities to justice and for Agip to abandon the use of the military in suppressing communities, and the instigation of ethnic struggles amongst the Niger Delta communities. May 1999.

Victory of local communities over Texaco

The Niger Delta, in the southern region of Nigeria, has been the scenario of environmental destruction and human rights abuses related to oil prospection and exploitation. The activity of oil companies like Shell, Mobil, Chevron and NAOC -supported by Nigerian armed corps- is strongly denounced and resisted by local communities. Local peoples have just achieved a great victory over the powerful US-based Texaco Company, which has been forced to stop its operations in the Delta region. This successful result was obtained as a result of effective protests and direct actions. For example, community members blockaded the Funiwa and North Apoi platforms, cutting production of more than 50,000 barrels per day of the light crude extracted from that area. At the same time, youths attacked Texaco's office in the southern industry hub of Warri.

Texaco is not the only oil multinational which has been forced to put and end to or scale back their operations due to the occupation of flow stations and oil platforms. Last January Shell, the largest producer of oil in the region, was the first to be shut down by non-violent protesters, and nowadays the company is operating at 25% capacity.

Although the oil companies have not yet left the area, opposition is mounting. In December 1998, nearly 500 Ijaw communities and over 200 non-governmental organizations around the world endorsed the Kaiama Declaration, which asked oil multinationals operating in the Niger Delta to voluntarily cease operations in order to seek remedy for the impacts of oil production on communities and their environment. August 1999.

The struggle continues

Four years have passed since the judicial murder of Ken Saro Wiwa together with other eight human rights activists to the hands of the Nigerian military dictatorship on November 10th 1995, that generated condemnation and outrage worldwide. Nevertheless - and in spite of the political changes that occurred in the country - environmental destruction and human rights abuses associated to oil exploration and extraction in the Niger Delta region continues. A delegation of US social and environmental organizations' representatives who visited that region during this month reported that the irresponsibility of the multinational oil companies operating in the area - e.g. Shell and Chevron - in relation to

environmental and social issues are threatening to the survival of local people and the fragile political stability of the country. The Nigerian government has not yet met the demands in the Ogoni Bill of Rights which would guarantee them their existence in their traditional territories. Additionally, the authorities continue to work in favour of oil companies and against their own people by not implementing the independent environmental impact assessment on Ogoniland as recommended by the UN. Environmental degradation and poverty are not only affecting the Ogoni, but also other people of the Niger Delta, such as the Ijaw, the Itsekiri, and the Urhobos.

"We the Ogonis have been cheated in the past 41 years of our fair share of revenue from oil exploration and extraction in our land by Shell with assistance from the governments of Nigeria. We need not restate the fact that in a land so richly blessed by nature, we have been met with poverty and injustice. Our people have nothing to show for their sacrifices and for a long time, this giant multinational corporation has continued to humiliate our existence. Shell has wasted our environment with oil exploration and in return repaid us with a degraded and polluted land, poisoned air and streams" reads a statement by MOSOP-UK (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People) dated September 10th. The Ogoni people reject the so called "Development Project Programme" that the company has proposed for their territory and have declared Shell "persona non grata" in Ogoniland.

"Lord take my soul, but the struggle continues" said Ken Saro Wiwa before being executed. His last message keeps its significance and vigour in these difficult times. September - October 1999.

A positive change in oil activities?

The Urhobo National Assembly (UNA), which represents the Urhobo nation in the Nigerian federal state, stopped all oil exploration activities in the region of the Niger Delta, where an oil spill fire destroyed last September a large area of fragile ecosystems. Once again the involved oil company is Royal Dutch Shell. It will remain expelled from several affected communities until an independent investigation on the explosion has been satisfactorily conducted and made known by experts from several Southern countries. The Urhobo also demanded for immediate clean up of all polluted land, as well as compensation. "When this spill occurred we thought we will be treated like human beings. But this has

gone a long way to prove right what our other neighbours have been telling us about oil firms, especially Shell, about their insincerity" said a leader of the Ikerre community.

As usual, Shell has not assumed any responsibility for the peoples' suffering. A trustworthy source of Shell admitted to ERA (Environmental Rights Action) at the Aluu-Agbada West flow station, that the pipes are very old and cannot withstand the much pressure. He attributed the frequent spills being experienced to this factor, among others. The last case of September 17 and 18 of 1999 has not been the only one in the Niger Delta. On December 12 of 1998 a blowout occurred on a Shell flow line leading to the Aluu-Agbada West flow station. The accident contributed to the pollution of the Onuigbo river, which is the only source of drinking water and fishing for the Omuike people.

In relation to the present situation of the country regarding communities and the environment, the Ijaw Youth Council stated that: "Nigeria is standing still on the ocean of oppression. We must move away from sinister waves of violence that have been let loose by the agents of injustice. We have only one option. We either march most relentlessly towards the finishing line of self-determination, resource control, environmental protection and a truly Federal Nigeria or be drowned."

In a surprising move that can mean a positive switch, the Federal Government has blamed the situation in the Niger Delta on what it called "heinous environmental crimes" of multinational oil companies. It also traced the killing of Ken Saro Wiwa and other activists to the activities of the oil companies. The government's spokesperson has been the Minister of State for Environment, Dr. Ime Okopido, who on October 22 outlined strict conditions for oil firms in the Niger Delta and gave them a six-week ultimatum to clean up the communities' environment. Nevertheless, only the future actions of the authorities will reflect how much they are interested in defending their own people's interests. The Nigerian Government has been and is still being severely criticised at the national as well as at the international level for its violation of human and environmental rights. November 1999.

Cross River's forests need your help

Between 70 and 80% of Nigeria's original forests have disappeared and nowadays the area of its territory occupied by forests is reduced to 12%,

even if the entire country is located in the humid tropics. All of the country's remaining primary rainforest watersheds, covering about 7,000 km², are located in Cross River state. This region also contains 1,000 km² of mangrove and swamp forest, being oil exploitation an important cause of their degradation and destruction.

Commercial logging and hunting of wildlife are important threats to Nigerian primary rainforest and its dependent species. Cross River state is very rich in biodiversity. It harbours several species of primates, migratory and resident birds, and 950 species of butterflies - a quarter of the number to be found in tropical Africa - 100 of which are endemic. Many of Africa's rarest trees, such as mahogany, ironwood, camwood and mimosup, grow in this forest, that is connected to a larger forest area in neighbouring Cameroon. Exports of roundwood of valuable species - such as afzelia (*Afzelia africana*), ekki, idigbo (*Terminalia ivorensis*), obeche, and teak (*Tectona grandis*) - to Europe, the USA and Japan is depleting Cross River's forests.

Social aspects concerning the region are also relevant. NGOCE - a coalition of Cross River conservation groups - is promoting activities for a sustainable use of the forests to the benefit of the local dwellers, as an alternative to the present depredation by foreign actors. Among them: education programmes for the local communities regarding the importance of a healthy forest to their self-sufficient lifestyle, assistance to the communities in developing alternative income-generating projects that will alleviate pressure on the forest, and support to fundraising efforts and provision of technical assistance to NGOs.

Recently Cross River state's new Governor, Mr. Donald Duke, suspended all forest logging concessions that were granted under the previous administration. The cancellation of logging licenses is connected with the reckless manner in which the forest reserves had been exploited and a response to the continuous demands of environmental and social NGOs, as the above named NGOCE. December 1999.

Environmental racism

In tropical countries oil companies generally act with strong support from local governments. Nigeria, and especially its Niger Delta region, is a paradigmatic case. As a result of the visit that representatives from US social and environmental organizations made to the Niger Delta region in

September 1999, the NGO "Global Exchange and Essential Action" has recently published a report titled "Oil For Nothing: Multinational Corporations, Environmental Destruction, Death and Impunity in the Niger Delta." The report says that Chevron, Shell, Mobil, Elf and Agip, "act as a destabilizing force, pitting one community against another, and acting as a catalyst - together with the military with whom they work closely - to some of the violence racking the region today." It underscores that even if during the last 40 years both the Nigerian government and oil multinationals have made huge profits out of the oil extracted from the Niger Delta, the region undergoes high unemployment and poverty rates, corruption, repression, failing crops, declining fisheries, polluted waters, dying forests and vanishing wildlife. Far from contributing to the welfare of the region, oil corporations, the government and the military have exploited ethnic differences in the Delta, as well as menaced and murdered people to avoid any opposition attempt.

Nevertheless, resistance by the Niger Delta peoples continues. Last February the Ijaw National Youth called on the government and the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta to enter into genuine dialogue with local communities "on the matter of resource control, self-determination and a truly federal Nigeria." At the international level, abuses by the military to the detriment of local dwellers are continually being denounced. The government's announcement last October of strict conditions for oil firms to clean up the communities' environment was cautiously but well received by environmental and social organizations. However, there are still no clear signs showing that things have really changed for the better.

It is interesting to point out that "Oil for nothing" was released in the US, coinciding with mounting opposition against a major Chevron refinery in California which is being accused of releasing dangerous pollutants. Several cases of environmental racism - such as the location of polluting industries among poor, generally black communities - have been denounced in that country. It is the same racism that Northern oil companies show with regards to people and the environment in Nigeria. March 2000.

Shell sets forests on fire

In October 1999 the Nigerian Minister of the Environment himself blamed multinational oil companies for the situation reigning in the Niger Delta, and gave them a six-week ultimatum to clean up the communities'

environment affected by several oil spills. However, nothing much seems to have changed.

For six months -from 10 June 1998 to December 1998- a pipeline belonging to Shell Petroleum Development Company Limited (SPDC) in Kolo Creek, at Num River watershed, burst and discharged crude oil into the Oyara mangrove forests, endangering Otuegwe 1, a small rural community with predominantly indigenous population devoted to farming and fishing. Due to heavy rains that occurred during this period, the oil spill dispersed into surrounding water streams, farms and sacred sites of the Otuegwe. To face the accusations that blamed the company, Shell opted to blame the victims, and attributed the spill to an act of sabotage. Thus it declined to assume the responsibility of repairing the leaking pipeline.

Local communities of farmers and fisherfolk, which had to suffer not only from health hazards but also from the impacts of the spill on their natural resources, started a campaign with the help of the Niger Delta Human and Environmental Rescue Organisation (ND-HERO). At last Shell had to respond to such pressure and hired Willbros Nigerian Ltd to repair the leakage. The company also chose an "environmentally responsible" way of eliminating the remaining residue of the oil spill: it set fire to vast extents of forest! This strategy of forest burning seems to be the official policy of Shell as a means of "cleaning" crude oil spills in the Niger Delta. Other communities of the Niger Delta, as Obelele and Igebiri, have witnessed this same Shell policy, and already 3,500 km² have been destroyed by the effect of the drastic method of provoking intentional fires.

As a result of the negative impacts of this activity, people of the Niger Delta do not want the oil companies in general -and Shell in particular- any longer in their territories. However, oil transnationals and the Federal Government continue to ignore the communities' claims, who have to pay the high cost of cheap oil. "We promise to listen", says Shell in its web page. But in the Niger Delta, the company seems to have become almost completely deaf. April 2000.

Poverty, oil pipelines and death

Blaming the victims is common practice in many places. In the case of Nigeria, such practice can only be defined as criminal. On July 11, more than 200 villagers from Adeje died when a gasoline pipeline exploded.

Many others suffer from terrible injuries. The media reports that "the victims were villagers who were scooping up gasoline after the pipeline, which carries refined petroleum products from Warri to northern Nigeria, was punctured by thieves on Sunday night." So they were thieves and those who punctured the pipeline were "vandals". As easy as that. End of the story. For the government, "several lives" were lost and "a vital petroleum products pipeline" destroyed.

Any more or less responsible journalist should have asked why people are "vandalizing" the pipelines and why people are "stealing" gasoline. Even worse: the news carry the necessary information to reach the obvious conclusions. But the conclusions are not there. The blame is on the victims.

Nigeria, says the Associated Press, "is the world's sixth-largest oil exporter, accounting for about one-twelfth of the oil imported by the United States. Sales of crude oil account for more than 80 percent of the government's revenue." The same agency informs that "some cases of sabotage are carried out by militant activists trying to force the government and oil companies to compensate communities for land use and alleged pollution. In other cases, villagers break open the pipeline and collect the gushing fuel to make a crude mixture of oil and gasoline for cheap generators and other motors."

The above information shows that local communities have not been compensated for their lands, that their environment has been polluted and that none of the wealth generated by oil has "trickled down" to local communities. People don't go about vandalizing oil pipelines just for fun - almost 500 cases of vandalism were reported in 1999 - nor do they collect gasoline to be sold on the roads as a hobby. The former is done through anger and frustration and the latter for dire need. The Associated Press itself links these issues by saying that "pipeline sabotage is common in poverty-wracked Nigeria." An official of the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation came closer to honesty when he said -requesting anonymity- that vandalisation of fuel pipelines was "rampant" in the region, adding: "The issue is not just sabotage. It is simply stealing of fuel to survive."

A government statement, signed by Information Minister Jerry Gana, said that Nigeria has spent "enormous resources" to educate people about the need to "protect installations and oil pipelines so as to avoid these tragic accidents which have always resulted in loss of lives and property." So the

official conclusion is that people continue being ignorant in spite of the government's educational activities!

People are not ignorant. They need to survive. They need a healthy environment to live in. And that's what they are trying to do in different manners. The blame for this tragedy is not on the people. It's on the greed of oil corporations -none of the major ones where named in the news- and on the government's unwillingness to protect its own people and environment. July 2000.

At whose expense is oil drilled in the Niger Delta?

Indigenous peoples of the oil-rich Niger Delta region continue to suffer environmental degradation, poverty and violence to the hands of oil companies that operate in the area. The companies themselves, together with the Nigerian and Northern country governments are responsible for the present state of things.

Shell, that holds a sad record during its long history in the Niger Delta, has set aside a total of US\$ 1billion to develop its offshore oil and gas field in the region. This project is being financed by a funding agreement between oil companies in Nigeria and the Nigerian Petroleum Corporation. Since oil accounts for 90% of Nigeria's foreign earnings, the Nigerian Government is interested in increasing the country's crude oil production at all cost. At the same time, the state is in charge of the "security" of the area. This does not mean defending the right of local communities to live in peace in a healthy environment but, on the contrary, defending oil companies' interests to the detriment of the Niger Delta population. The Nigerian government is not alone in this task. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP-UK) has recently denounced that the US government has granted military aid consisting of eight fast attack vessels to the Nigerian Navy, in order to patrol the region.

At whose expense is oil drilled in the Niger Delta? MOSOP-UK denounces that "the Niger Delta people are the ones who are bearing the brunt of the opportunity cost of oil exploration in Nigeria. The weight of this cost is increasingly proving too high to bear on the people". Paradoxically, the Niger Delta means enormous earnings for a few and at the same time poverty and sufferance for the vast majority. "While our children suffer malnutrition from starvation in a land of plenty; our husbands, fathers and brothers are being killed for protesting the injustice met on our land; our

women raped by oil company contractors and security agents; our environment destroyed with no hope for our future generations" says MOSOP-UK's President Ms. Gbenewa Phido.

She adds: "It is time the environment of Niger Delta people is protected. It is time the continuous harassment and intimidation of Niger Delta people by oil companies and the Nigerian Security agents is stopped. It is time Niger Delta people are appreciated and respected as a people with rights and not treated as hooligans and troublemakers as has been portrayed in the recent past. It is time Niger Delta people stood up and remain standing until their rights are restored." September 2000.

Shell's choice between profits and principles

Shell is continuing its clever misleading propaganda orchestrated through advertisements circulating in the most influential press media of the North, in order to revamp its tarnished image and convince public opinion that it is an environmentally friendly company. The campaign "Profits and Principles: Is there a choice?" is based on beautiful photographs of wild animals, lush forests, and tender faces of African people accompanied by texts like: "Time and again at Shell we're discovering the rewards of respecting the environment when doing business". "If we're exploring for oil and gas reserves in environmental sensitive regions, we consult widely with the different local and global interest groups to ensure that biodiversity in each location is preserved." "At Shell we are committed to support fundamental human rights. We invest in the communities around us to create new opportunities and growths."

Nevertheless in the Niger Delta reality could not be more far away from the self image the company is making efforts to show. Since 1958, when Shell arrived to the region a nightmare began for the Ogoni, an indigenous nation of about 500,000 people living in the area. Counting on the support of successive governments Shell took hold of Ogoniland. As in other parts of the world where oil is exploited, the result has been high unemployment and poverty rates, environmental devastation and loss of livelihoods for the local people. Repression has been brutal. About 80,000 people had their villages destroyed and about 2,000 were killed by the state armed corps. Last November 10th marked the 5th anniversary of the murder of the environmental leaders Ken Saro Wiwa, Barinem Kiobel, John Kpuinen, Saturday Dorbee, Paul Levura, Nordu Eawo, Felix Nuate, Daniel Gboko and Baribor Bera. Their "crime" was to fight for the rights of their people

against abuses committed by Shell and the Nigerian military government that was backing it.

In 1993 the Ogoni declared Shell "persona non grata" and got it out of their lands. But after an absence of seven years the company is menacing to return to Ogoniland. In April this year the announcement was made that the only aim of Shell was to remove its remaining facilities, which were causing environmental problems in the area due to the emission of poisonous gases and uncontrolled leaking. Nonetheless in October Shell admitted that its real intentions were to reactivate its 125 oil wells in the region. If this happens violence, collusion and misery will increase. It is clear that Shell has got an answer to the question of whether there is a choice between profits and principles. The answer is yes and the choice is profits. November 2000.

Malaysian corporation to invest in palm oil production

Malaysia is the world's top producer and exporter of palm oil, generating fifty percent of the global output, of which 85% is exported. Within the African continent, Nigeria is the country having the more extensive oil palm plantations, with at least 350,000 hectares planted to this crop. According to recent news, a Malaysian corporation will begin to invest in Nigeria's palm oil sector, with government support from both countries.

Sime Darby Plantations - the largest oil palm producing company in Malaysia - will soon establish an oil palm processing refinery in Nigeria's Cross River State. This is the result of the five days visit to Cross River State by a delegation from Malaysia, which was a follow up to that by the state governor to that country some months ago and is at the instance of the prime minister of Malaysia.

The leader of the Malaysian delegation announced the intention to establish an oil palm processing refinery shortly after inspecting oil palm plantations in various parts of Cross River State. He revealed that it was the intention of Sime Darby Plantations to bring some of the new technological know-how in oil palm processing to the state and regretted the state of obsolete equipment in some of the oil estates visited.

He commended the Cross River State government for promoting and providing the enabling environment for business transactions in the state. The delegation visited the Export Processing Zone (EPZ), where its

general manager assured the team of free imports and exports. They also visited the Calabar seaport.

So everything seems to be set for this investment. There are however two questions that need to be posed. The first one is related to the Malaysian firm itself: what is Sime Darby's business? According to the company's own web page, it is "Malaysia's largest and oldest conglomerate" and "owns or has interests in more than 270 companies, primarily in Asia. Its core business activities include the distribution of autos (BMW, Ford, Land Rover) and heavy equipment (Caterpillar); the manufacture of finished rubber products (mainly tires); plantations (oil palm, rubber, cocoa, and fruit crops); property development; and trading. Sime Darby is also acquiring generation assets."

In relation with oil palm, the following is revealing: "The company is trusting that the diversity of its holdings will secure growth. While palm oil prices are falling, hurting the plantation business, there is increasing demand for Sime Darby-supplied automobiles and heavy equipment." The Nigerian government should take that into account before subsidising the company with "free imports and exports." If palm oil prices fall, Sime Darby will earn money through its other activities, but what about Nigeria?

The second question is related to oil palm itself. Oil palm plantations are spreading throughout the tropics and in all cases where large scale plantations of this crop are implemented there are reports of important social and environmental impacts. The jobs they generate are few, seasonal, badly paid and in bad working conditions. Local peoples are deprived of their livelihoods and the overall employment tends to decrease at the local level. Impacts on water, soils and biodiversity are widespread and in many cases lead to high deforestation rates. Can this be called development? December 2000.

Gold Medal to Shell: A mockery to the people

Oil companies are worldwide known for the negative environmental impact they produce both at the local and the global levels. While in the places where oil prospection and exploitation is performed, environmental destruction and social disruption is the rule, at the global level the burning of fossil fuels is one of the main causes of global warming.

In this regard, Shell's performance at the Niger Delta, in Nigeria, constitutes a paradigmatic example. The 'Human Rights & Environmental

Operations Information on the Royal Dutch/Shell Group of Companies, 1996-1997' states: "There are approximately 7,000 square km of mangroves in Rivers and Bayelsa States, which contain 349 drilling sites, 700 kilometres of flowlines, 22 flow stations, and one terminal. According to a European Community study, the waters of the Niger Delta contain levels of petroleum ranging from 8 ppm to 60 ppm. ...these levels are hazardous to both aquatic and human life." To face increasing criticisms, Shell recently launched a campaign - "Profits and Principles. Is there a choice?" - in influential Northern press media, trying to portray itself as environmentally sound and a defender of human rights.

The campaign seems to have born fruit: Shell will receive next March the 2001 Gold Medal for International Corporate Environmental Achievement awarded by the World Environment Center (WEC). According to WEC's web site, this prize is annually awarded "to a major multinational corporation with an outstanding, creative, sustained and well-implemented global environmental policy . . . The Jury cited Shell for its commitment to sustainable development, both as a guiding principle for its worldwide operations and as a cornerstone of the company's management values".

If one looks at Shell's sad environmental and social record in Nigeria and other parts of the world such decision is impossible to understand. Nevertheless, considering who are involved in the WEC and which companies received the award in previous years, things become much more clear. In effect, according to its web site, "WEC continues to carry out its mission thanks to the generosity of its many funders". Many of the biggest oil, pulp and paper, biotechnology and chemical companies in the world are included as funders: British Petroleum, Occidental Petroleum, Exxon, Texaco, International Paper, Weyerhaeuser, Novartis, Monsanto, BASF, Dow Chemical, and, of course, the Royal Dutch Shell Group. In 1986 the precious Gold Medal was granted to Exxon, in 1989 to Dow Chemical, and in 2000 to International Paper! February 2001.

Palm oil deficit in a traditional palm oil producing country

Oil palm is indigenous to the Nigerian coastal plain, having migrated inland as a staple crop. In the case of Nigeria, oil palm cultivation is part of the way of life - indeed it is the culture - of millions of people. However, during the past decades the country has become a net importer of palm oil. While in the early 1960s, Nigeria's palm oil production accounted for

43% of the world production, nowadays it only accounts for 7% of total global output.

Contrary to the situation of the oil palm heavyweights Malaysia and Indonesia - whose production is based on large-scale monocultures - in Nigeria 80% of production comes from dispersed smallholders who harvest semi-wild plants and use manual processing techniques. Several million smallholders are spread over an estimated area of 1.65 million hectares in the southern part of Nigeria. Oil palm is inter-cropped with food crops such as cassava, yam and maize.

In an attempt to emulate the "success stories" of the two above mentioned countries, Nigeria tried to implement large-scale plantations, which resulted in complete failures. Such were the cases of the 1960's Cross River State project and of the European Union-funded "Oil palm belt rural development programme" in the 1990's. This project included the plantation of 6,750 hectares of oil palm within an area thought to be one of the largest remnants of tropical rainforest in Nigeria. In spite of local opposition, the project moved forward and EU funding was only discontinued in 1995, seven years after its approval.

The project was implemented by a company called Risonplan Ltd., partly owned by the government. The company appropriated land owned by local communities without their consent and with minimal compensation. Once land had been secured, Risonpalm constructed a huge dyke and bulldozed many thousands of hectares of the project area for cultivation. Local peoples' forests, farms and grave sites were destroyed, fish ponds were poisoned, pesticides banned in Europe were used, and land tenure problems arose. The dyke and drains have considerably altered the hydrology of the area which has already led to the death of trees. The proliferation of roads led to an increase in logging and hunting, and it is expected that all of the area's mature timber trees will be felled in the near future. As revealed in the Commission's own mid-term review, the use of heavy machinery caused compaction of soils. Local peoples conducted strikes and tried to obstruct the project, which consultants to the Commission conceded was the "*only effective means to express their discontent*".

Other large scale projects have resulted in similar impacts and have also resulted in major failures. The situation thus appears to be at a standpoint, where neither monocultures nor smallholdings seem able to provide answers to the problem of the scarcity of palm oil in one of the countries where the oil palm is native. However - according to experienced local

people - the solution to the problem should not be impossible to achieve if adequate policies were put in place and implemented, along with certain guidelines such as:

- Large scale monocultures should not be implemented because they involve soil - and in many places water - mining, they damage ecosystems, undermine human society and they are an inefficient way of producing resources.

- Investments should be made in terms of processing capacity and technology. The capacity of traditional presses is very low. The efficiency of these methods is lower than modern mills and oil extraction rates range from 20% to 50% compared with 90% in Malaysia.

- The investments however, need to be directed towards the small farmer and farmer co-operatives where oil palm cultivation continues as a manipulation of "wild" groves, as part of mixed farming and as small plantations of one or two hectares.

- Production of existing plantations should be maximised - so that new ones are not required - and returned to the original landowners as smallholder blocks that will inevitably be converted into a more mixed and more viable agricultural ecosystem.

The above approach is essential for poverty elimination and for the economic empowerment of local people, whilst at the same time serving the country's interests as a whole. June 2001.

People protect mangroves against shrimp farming

The Nigerian area of saline mangrove swamps stretches through the coastal states with 504,800 hectares in the Niger Delta and 95,000 hectares in Cross River State. The mangrove forests of Nigeria rank as the largest in Africa and as the third largest in the world.

The Niger Delta has provided the best conditions for the thriving of vegetation on the Nigerian coast. Many of these areas are truly representative of untouched mangrove forests, as well as being reserves that protect unique and threatened valuable species. By some estimates, over 60% of fishes caught between the Gulf of Guinea and Angola breed in the mangrove belt of the Niger delta.

Typically, these are fragile ecosystems which can be easily destroyed by unsustainable human interventions such as oil exploration, exploitation and transportation processes.

The inhabitants of historical settlements in the Niger Delta depend on fish and other mangrove resources for their livelihood. Mangrove wood is still a multi-purpose resource for fish stakes, fish traps, boat building, boat paddles, yam stakes, fencing, carvings, building timber and fuel.

Although there is an institutional framework for the management of forests and wildlife, existing legislation is either obsolete or ineffectively enforced. Some areas have been proposed for wetland conservation but none of the proposals have been implemented.

Current problems for mangrove conservation include urban development, coastal erosion, oil pollution, gas flaring as well as the replacement of native mangroves by the exotic palm *Nypa fruticans*, which has been identified as an ecological disaster deserving urgent attention.

Now, a new menace looms on the Nigerian horizon: industrial shrimp farming. Sponsored by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a branch of the World Bank, the Shell Petroleum Company of Nigeria Contractors will receive funds to develop this activity with the support of the Nigerian President.

The Mangrove Forest Conservation Society of Nigeria, together with other NGOs and CBOs - Rights Action, Friends of the Earth Nigeria, Eni-Owei _OU-Degema, ECO-out reach, Agape is a birth right, Niger Delta Project for Environment, Human rights and Development (NDPEHRD), Civil Liberty organization, Ijaw Council for Human Right (ICHR), Niger Delta Protect League (NDPL), Okoloma Forum and Kalio-Ama Ecological Foundation - are opposing the project and propose a rejection/moratorium on the IFC Credit Loan facilities to Shell Contractors without consultation. They will also draw up a programme to reverse presidential or any other support for shrimp farming. October 2001.

Godforsaken by oil

The Niger Delta is one of the world's largest wetlands, and the largest in Africa: it encompasses over 20,000 square kilometers. It is a vast floodplain built up by the accumulation of centuries of silt washed down the Niger and Benue Rivers, composed of four main ecological zones -

coastal barrier islands, mangroves, fresh water swamp forests, and lowland rainforests - whose boundaries vary according to the patterns of seasonal flooding.

The mangrove forest of Nigeria is the third largest in the world and the largest in Africa; over 60 percent of this mangrove, or 6,000 square kilometers, is found in the Niger Delta. The freshwater swamp forests of the delta reach 11,700 square kilometers and are the most extensive in west and central Africa. The Niger Delta region has the high biodiversity characteristic of extensive swamp and forest areas, with many unique species of plants and animals. It also contains 60 - 80 per cent of all Nigerian plant and animal species. The Niger Delta alone has 134 fresh water and brackish water fish species as compared with 192 for the entire continent of Europe

All that is being destroyed, within the framework of widespread human rights violations, by oil transnationals such as Shell, Agip, Mobil, Texaco and Chevron. As Nnimmo Bassey from Oilwatch says: "The story of oil and gas in Africa is the story of rogue exploitation, despoliation and bizarre brigandage. It is a story of pollution, displacement and pillage. It is a montage of burnt rivers, burnt forests and maimed lives. An oil well is a death sentence if it is located in your backyard."

Perhaps the best description of the essence of oil exploitation is the one overheard by Nnimmo while standing at the Johannesburg International Airport behind two US oil industry workers based in Nigeria. "Just imagine," one said, "how crude oil is always found in Godforsaken places." "No," the partner replied, "it is crude oil exploitation that makes those places Godforsaken." Amen.

To the government and oil TNCs, the Niger Delta's biodiversity and peoples mean nothing. What matters is only the oil hidden underneath. Nature and people are simply obstacles to be removed. The Niger Delta produces 3.2 per cent of the world's oil requirements. Oil exports make up over 90 per cent of Nigeria's export income, bringing the government a daily revenue of US\$ 20 million.

But in spite of the brutality of the TNC-government alliance, people continue resisting the destruction of their environment and livelihoods. Such resistance is fraught with danger. Ken Saro-Wiwa, was "legally" assassinated - by hanging - in November 1995, but his message is as strong as ever. Ken described the environment in Ogoni as having been "completely devastated by three decades of reckless oil exploitation or

ecological warfare by Shell... An ecological war is highly lethal, the more so as it is unconventional. It is omniscidal in effect. Human life, flora, fauna, the air, fall at its feet, and finally, the land itself dies."

It would perhaps be a good idea to ask the "distinguished delegates" of the countries where the relevant TNCs are based, as well as to the "distinguished delegates" of Nigeria present at the upcoming Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity: is this what you mean by biodiversity conservation? March 2002.

RWANDA

The un-reported plight of the Batwa

The World Bank first and the Hutu-Tutsi civil war later have led the Batwa pigmies to near extinction and years of suffering, without this being reported by the world mass media.

In 1967 the World Bank and the European Fund started to implement a project of cattle raising and potato production in the forests occupied by the Batwa. They were expelled from their forest without explanation nor compensation of any kind. In 1982 the World Bank considered that only 5,000 hectares of these forests should be protected, while the rest was to be converted to cattle raising, pine plantations and military objectives. During the whole process the Batwa were completely ignored by the Bank's "experts". As a result, the Batwa were deprived of their livelihoods and the Gishwati forest shrunk to a mere 3800 hectares.

The already serious problems that the Batwa were facing dramatically increased during the 1990-1994 Hutu-Tutsi war, were they suffered attacks from both sides. Before 1994, the Batwa population was estimated in some 30000 people and 10000 - a third - were killed during a confrontation in which they did not take part. In spite of this, they were never mentioned in the mass media's coverage of the war. The country's forests also suffered and it is estimated that some 15000 hectares of forests were destroyed, while a further 35000 hectares were seriously degraded during the war.

A 61-year old Batwa says: "We were chased out of our forest, which was our father because it provided us with food through gathering and hunting ... The State chased us out of the forest and we had to settle in the fringes, where we die of starvation. All the development projects that were

carried out in Gishwati forest have done nothing for us and no Batwa has even received the benefit of a job."

During all these years, the World Bank has been recognizing its past errors and has developed a number of policies regarding the protection of forests and forest peoples' rights. Although these are positive developments, they are useless for the Batwa unless the Bank commits itself to redress its past errors and works out a solution for them, whose plight began with a World Bank project. It may not be a bureaucratic necessity, but it certainly is a moral obligation. May 2000.

SENEGAL

The hidden impacts of charcoal production

For many years, fuelwood use and charcoal production have been blamed for deforestation throughout the South, though this has seldom been the truth. In the case of Senegal it is clearly false. Charcoal is a major energy source in this country, where its capital city Dakar consumes 90 per cent of all the charcoal produced from the forest. However, forests are not even close to exhaustion, and regeneration after woodcutting is reported to be quite robust. But charcoal production is resulting in other types of impacts on the local communities where it is being produced, which have usually gone unreported.

It is important to highlight that in Senegal the state claims ownership over all forests and its Forest Service claims the right to manage them according to "national needs". Within the charcoal production sector, the management system put in place by the Forest Service only allows urban-based merchants to cut the forest, produce charcoal and market it. These merchants hire woodcutters from outside the area. The result is that local communities receive very few benefits from this activity, while the social and ecological costs of forest clearing are spread over the villages as a whole, disproportionately affecting women and poorer households.

In the case of women interviewed on this matter, they have recounted that before the arrival of charcoal producers, firewood had been available just outside the compounds, whereas after the first two years, firewood had to be gathered at distances of several kilometres, requiring anywhere from a couple of hours to half a day to collect. They have also explained that charcoal production has led to the disappearance of game birds and animals which are part of their diet. Additionally, they have complained

that the presence of migrant charcoal producers drew down the wells, creating water shortages and water quality problems. Other concerns include social problems arising from hosting scores of migrant woodcutters in the village, harassment of women in the forest and fights over wood gathering between woodcutters and women.

Other impacts affect the community as a whole, among which the destruction of plants used for food, fodder, medicines and dyes, as well as wood for house construction. Woodcutters are also accused of starting bushfires, while heavy truckloads of charcoal are responsible for destroying the roads so badly that villagers are unable to take their products to market and to bring back the products they need.

This unfair situation, where local people receive only the impacts of a lucrative activity - some of the traders are reported to have made 100,000 US dollars in profits per year - has in some cases resulted in organized resistance. Such is the case of the district of Makacoulibantang in Eastern Senegal, where local villagers have blocked urban-based merchants and their migrant woodcutters from working in their forests. Resistance was partly aimed at stopping the destruction of a resource on which they depend for daily needs and partly to reap some of the benefits from woodfuel production and commerce.

Unfortunately, the Forest Service has continued taking sides with the merchants, while the minister for the protection of nature has visualized those acts of resistance as "a dangerous set of events that could spread" and adding that "if villagers were given control of the forests there would be fuel shortages in Dakar." However, the minister appears to forget that the only fuel shortages in Dakar have been purposely created by merchants to obtain further benefits. What they have done is to threaten the ministers and the Forest Service with shortages in order to eke out quotas and to keep the forest policy friendly to their interests - in which until now they have been very successful. July 2001.

SOUTH AFRICA

More pulp industry development

A new pulp mill that will produce between 400,000 and 500,000 metric tonnes a year, largely for export, is being planned for the Umtata-Kokstad-Ugie triangle. According to Enoch Gogongwana, provincial MEC (Member of the Executive Council) for Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism,

such project would create 600 direct and 1000 indirect jobs. The total investment would involve some 1.5 billion Rands.

The above implies a cost of 937 000 rands per job -direct and indirect-created. By comparison, a non forestry-related community project put together at Mkambati, will provide 138 jobs at a cost of 6000 rands per job, and all enterprises (more than 10) participating in the project will be owned and run by the community, with the result that the money will stay in the community.

Additional problems are the environmental and health impacts associated with pulp mills, which are not something new to South Africa. It has been said that "the smell, choking and feeling of skin burning just driving past the pulp mill near Nelsrui is terrible." If the new pulp mill is to be situated in the Kokstad-Ugie-Umtata triangle, then at least one river may end up being polluted, given that all rivers in this area flow into the Umzimvubu river, which catches 56% of Transkei's water. October 1997.

"Social benefits" of industrial tree plantations

The Forest Owners' Association recently released a report from results of a survey during the first nine months of last year on "crime and violence" in the so-called South African forests (in reality large industrial eucalyptus and pine tree plantations) in the Kwazulu Natal area. The survey covered 54% of total afforestation in the country -over 800.000 hectares.

According to a company's forest manager, plantations "were increasingly becoming safe heavens for people who lived in violence-torn rural townships, which mostly neighboured the plantations."

Crime, arson and theft were the main problems highlighted by the survey. Crime against individuals resulted in 380 deaths and 115 seriously injured people. According to the report, "people were being shot on the way to work, timber-carrying trucks were being fired at, and intimidation was becoming a serious problem." Arson was responsible for 1093 or 74% of all forest (plantations) fires and 2825 hectares were damaged by arson during the period. Some 30.000 tons of timber was stolen in the same period.

Industry is "deeply concerned" about the issue and the largest corporations (including Mondi and Sappi) have met the South African Police Service and the South African National Defence Force to find

solutions. It has also had to invest heavily in security, fire fighting and communications equipment. December 1997.

Good news

The Kruger National Park is to be enlarged by 5,000 hectares, while by the same agreement recently concluded, the Makuleke community regains its right to 25,000 hectares of Kruger Park lands. Settlement of the Makuleke land claim came just in time for the celebration of the centenary of Kruger National Park on March 25. In 1968 the Makuleke community was forced to leave their lands now falling within the borders of the Kruger National Park. By the terms of the newly reached agreement with South Africa National Parks (SANP), the Pafuri area -at the northern boundary of the Park- will be returned to the community composed of 1,800 families, while maintaining the conservation status of the land. "We have here a very important piece of real estate, which should be preserved for our people. However, it is important that this should happen in the context of people having full access to, and full utilisation of their land. This is a win-win situation" said the spokesman of Makulele community. March 1998.

The ways of the powerful pulp industry

Timber plantations have been a part of the South African landscape for more than a century. Colonial settlement brought a wide range of exotic tree species. Not all were successful, but it soon became clear that Australian acacias and eucalyptus were well suited to conditions in the Eastern part of South Africa.

It has always been accepted that these trees, together with Pine species introduced more recently, play an important role in the local economy. As natural forests had been seriously depleted during the nineteenth century, it was considered necessary to obtain alternative, fast-growing trees to meet the growing demand for building timber, mine-props, packaging material and of course more recently, to feed the local paper mills. This situation soon began to change when it was realised that external demand for timber products could stimulate exports from South Africa.

A Rayon mill was built by an Italian company at the coastal town of Mkomazi around 1950. Effluent from the mill was pumped directly into a river which entered the sea a few kilometres downstream. This gave

South Africans their first taste (and smell) of serious atmospheric and marine pollution.

Subsequently the SAPPI mill was built on the Tukela River at the town of Mandeni. The smell of this mill was detectable up to 50 km away, and liquid effluent was sprayed onto a large tract of land near the mill.

Only after the giant SAPPI mill at Ngodwana, and the MONDI mill at Richards Bay, were put into production did people start to take a more serious view of the situation. Environmental awareness helped people to make the connection between respiratory disease and atmospheric pollution. A serious effluent spill at the Ngodwana Mill put shocking pictures of dead fish on the front pages of newspapers and people started to ask questions about the true impacts of these mills.

As raw timber was desperately needed to feed the hungry mills, the two companies already mentioned, SAPPI and MONDI, together with a number of smaller players, went on a buying spree, paying very high prices for land in close proximity to their mills so that they could consolidate their operations into vast estates and take advantage of lower transport costs.

In their hurry to plant up all this new land, very little consideration was given to environmental impacts -trees were planted in wetlands and streams and estate managers were paid bonuses to maximise production in these areas. Even public land including road reserves and commonage was ruthlessly planted to trees with no thought given to the consequences.

At about this time the South African government decided to "commercialise" the state-owned timber plantations and SAFCOL (South African Timber Company Ltd) was born. Before very long they (SAFCOL) too had jumped onto the bandwagon and got busy with planting more trees into all the natural grasslands that had been excluded previously due to their ecological sensitivity.

The ways of Corporate tree-planters

It has been estimated that the larger corporate entities responsible for the expansion of pulpwood plantations in South Africa spend more money and effort on propaganda than on actual environmental protection and restoration. Their reaction to public criticism of their actions is to spend more money on advertising in journals and newspapers. They sponsor a

wide range of "Environmental" projects - from bird and flower books to education and waste recycling.

In recent years it has been part of the timber companies' strategy to employ "environmentalists" to interface with their critics. In many cases these people are recruited from government conservation agencies who appear to be easily tempted by prospects of employment in the corporate world. These paid "environmentalists" are used as spokespeople -making statements to the media- speaking at schools and clubs, spreading the false message that their employers are actually improving the environment by planting millions of exotic trees. At shows and fairs, pine tree seedlings are given to schoolchildren as part of the brainwashing exercise. Poorly informed people are duped into believing that all trees are good.

In order to defuse public anger over loss of natural surface water caused by plantations they install boreholes in the affected areas. People who previously had clean water virtually at their doorsteps are then forced to carry water over long distances to their houses and gardens. Areas where crops such as bananas, potatoes, cabbages and many others could be grown without irrigation before are now too dry.

Cattle and goats are forced to overcrowd the few remaining natural springs and rivers -damaging rivers and stream banks- trampling and polluting springs and ponds, making this water unfit for human consumption.

The two large pulpwood producers have embarked on promoting "community woodlots" on an extensive scale in rural areas. MONDI has claimed that their scheme is part of the RDP (Government Reconstruction and Development Program), to fool the community.

The companies provide seedlings and basic information on how to establish the woodlot, after persuading subsistence farmers that they will become wealthy when their trees are ready for harvesting in seven or eight years' time!

What they fail to do is to inform prospective "woodlot" owners of the environmental and social consequences of their actions.

- They do not warn them not to plant in wetlands or close to rivers and streams.
- They do not tell them that they will have to find other land for their livestock to graze on.

- They do not warn them about loss of income from their land for the next seven years at least.
- They are not warned that their water supply may be affected negatively.
- They are not told that there is no guarantee that the company will buy their trees when they are ready.
- They are not adequately informed about the costs of services provided by the company.
- They are not told how difficult and expensive it will be to convert their land back to pastures or other crops.

Claims of creating employment for local people do not explain what happened to people previously employed on the land. With the expansion of the plantation companies' landholdings, many people who were employed in vegetable, sugar cane or livestock farming are ejected from homes and land they have occupied for many years. It is the policy of the plantation companies to consolidate smaller farms into large "blocks" which can be managed by a single "forester". Farm houses, sheds and staff accommodation cottages are demolished to make way for contiguous plantations. People who may have lived on these farms all their lives are forced to relocate to overpopulated tribal areas where they have to build new houses -relocate their children to already overcrowded schools- look for new jobs in sectors where they lack appropriate experience and know-how.

To make matters worse, most of the work opportunities created by the timber companies is sourced out to contractors who are not obliged to offer normal fringe benefits associated with permanent employment. Many of these contractors prefer to use desperate illegal immigrants who are prepared to work for lower wages and cannot belong to a labour union.

State complicity in the development of the industry

Pulp and paper mills in South Africa have benefitted from massive financial incentives, both directly through assistance from the IDC (Industrial Development Corporation) and indirectly through access to cheap water and electricity, free pollution, and very favourable tax laws.

This gives the industry a significant advantage, together with its ability to manipulate the price of roundwood through its own extensive plantations. By holding the raw log price as low as possible, it is possible to ensure that maximum profits are accrued to the mills.

Both MONDI and SAPPI have acquired mills in Europe and other northern countries. The simple explanation for this is that they need a guaranteed outlet for the products of their South African operations. The less obvious explanation may be that these investments are a way of laundering the surplus accumulated profits made at the expense of South Africa's environment and people.

Planned expansion of plantations

It is the stated intention of the industry to increase the area in South Africa by 600,000 hectares more -which would add to the existing 1.5 million- and they also aim to establish extensive plantations in Mozambique.

What is of serious concern is that intensive research into the development of cold-resistant strains of eucalyptus species is being undertaken. If this research is successful it could mean that vast tracts of the interior which presently consist of grasslands and grain production farms, could fall victim to tree plantations.

The grassland areas inland of the sub-tropical coastal belt are vital to water production in South Africa. They are able to absorb rainfall in the summer which is then released slowly to feed rivers and streams during the dry winter. If extensive tree plantations were to be established in these areas, it would jeopardise the supply of water to farmers and townspeople situated downstream as well as exacerbate soil erosion.

Computerised mechanical harvesting machines have been imported by MONDI. These machines operate 24 hours a day, felling, pruning, debarking, cutting and stacking. Three eight-hour shifts employing three people as opposed to an estimated 200 workers using manual methods - leaving 197 workers made redundant by a single machine.

Most plantation operators have also converted from labour-intensive weed control methods to using herbicides applied by specialist contractors. Once again resulting in fewer people being employed directly by the industry.

In sum -as elsewhere else- this forestry model is clearly showing that, although highly beneficial for large corporations, its social and environmental impacts make its unsustainable in the long run. People in South Africa are already organizing opposition and its environmental and social impacts are becoming clearer as the industry expands over larger areas of the country and even to neighbouring countries. July 1998.

Exotic tree plantations are green wastelands

What follows is a contribution sent by a new friend of the WRM for its dissemination, which highlights problems caused by tree monocultures in his country:

"Adapt or die

I live in the province of Mpumalanga (where the sun rises), South Africa. I live on a protected reserve, close to the Sudwala Caves and Rainforest. The immediate area surrounding the reserve is under exotic plantations, and it is obvious to see the effect of this model on the environment.

I often think of the mountain. I imagine every living thing being luminous, so that they would glow at night. I like to think that plants would have a soft glow, trees like the giant wild figs or beautiful Stinkwoods would glow brighter. Insects would glitter, a mouse would gleam, an owl radiate, a leopard shine. In the reserve I see the mountain, shimmering with life. When I look beyond, at the vast areas of exotics I see a monotonous feeble glow. Exotic tree plantations ARE green wastelands. They smother the indigenous life, not allowing enough water and light to sustain growth. No plants, no insects, no birds, no reptiles, no mammals. Small pockets of indigenous growth is preserved, mostly as a public relations exercise, and it is not enough to compensate for loss of habitat. Programs are in place to clear clogged water ways, but much too slowly, and, it seems, as if it has little effect on the overall runoff, as huge areas of water catchment should be cleared. Many residents of this region experience escalating water shortages, due to plantations. Legislation are in place to secure wetlands, but it is not enforced due to lack of man power. I believe exotic plantations should be cut back drastically. No more new planting permits should be issued. Plantation managers should change to environmentally friendly products, which would be more labor intensive as harvests occur on a yearly basis.

It is not nice to be thirsty, that is why water is such an emotive issue. Water shortage could lead to serious conflict in the future, as many countries in southern Africa share rivers as borders. In September 1998, troops from South Africa and Botswana invaded Lesotho to quell political uprising. Fierce fighting occurred to secure the Katse dam, a vital link in the Lesotho Highlands Water project. This project holds water reserves for use in South Africa. It has been suggested that the "war" was motivated, at least in part, by the need to secure the strategic water reserve.

In the face of ever increasing energy consumption man-kind is on the verge of a major crisis. This is a time when we should be taking care of the earth, treating it with respect, correcting the wrongs of the past, as our own survival depends upon biodiversity. I think we should adapt our way of thinking, recognize our dependence upon nature. Our environment shapes us, therefore we need to keep it healthy." By: Philip Owen. April 1999.

Privatizing plantations

The South African government announced in March 1999 that the state-owned timber plantations company SAFCOL, would be privatized. The company owns 332,000 hectares of commercial tree plantations and other assets valued at between 1 and 1.5 billion Rand (some 160-250 million US dollars). Although a number of social concerns are said to be part of the move (job creation, human resources development, promoting greater diversity of ownership and developing downstream activities), the fact is that the true beneficiaries will be the large national and transnational corporations.

One of those is MONDI, which is one of the biggest and most powerful corporations operating in the pulp and paper sector in South Africa. Its plantations have expanded with no consideration to environmental impacts on soils, grasslands, wetlands and streams, menacing water supply. Even public land including road reserves and commonage was used to establish tree monocultures. The environmental and health impacts associated with its pulp mills have also caused concern and resistance by affected communities. The company has adopted an aggressive policy of expansion. In May 1996 Mondi became one of Aracruz Celulose's three major shareholders. It has also acquired mills in Europe and other northern countries.

Now Mondi is moving to take advantage of the privatisation of SAFCOL to further concentrate on its pulp and paper operations. The idea is to sell some of its timber plantations and sawmills in Mpumalanga, linking the sale to SAFCOL's and thereby obtaining a better price for the sale. SAFCOL's 120,000 hectares of plantations in Mpumalanga can be combined with its own 143,000 hectares of plantations in Mpumalanga and Swaziland. The combined 263,000 hectares of plantations are composed of 195,000 hectares of softwood plantations and 68,000 hectares of hardwood plantations. Many SAFCOL and MONDI plantations

in these areas are adjacent and can therefore be transformed into management units in order to "enable the production of high-quality products at sufficiently low cost for international markets". MONDI would thus reduce its participation in the sawmilling sector, which has been facing difficult times recently, with falling demand for sawn timber and higher sawlog prices and concentrate on its core business (pulp, paper and packaging). Mondi owns 460,000 more hectares of plantations in South Africa, which it would retain to supply its pulp and paper operations, while it could also bid for other SAFCOL plantations composed of the adequate species and in the right locations to feed its pulpmills.

However, MONDI is not the only company interested in the sale. The other big local player in the South African plantation and pulp industry - SAPPI- is also among the 16 companies short-listed for the bid. Stand-alone international firms on the list are the Swedish defence and car group Saab, Indonesia's Barito Pacific Timber and Saudi Arabia's Tarik Al-Zahid Group. Two other foreign companies, which have entered consortia with local entities, also appear on the short list. These are the Londoloza Eco-African Forest Holdings consortium, made up of Italy's Gruppo Mauro Saviola, Magnaboard Holdings and Formalchem Holdings; and Madiba Forestry Consortium, which includes the York Timber Organisation, Portugal's Sonae Industria and empowerment group Madiba Mills.

Bidders can bid for the asset as a whole, for any one of seven packages that have been identified, or for any combination of packages. The underlying land will not be sold. Instead the assets will be offered on a long-term lease. Bidders will be asked to make an up-front payment as well as an annual rental payment reflecting the value of the land. Lease conditions will include -according to government officials- obligations regarding environmental management and the needs of local communities. Some forestry workers are to be transferred to the new owners' businesses, with the number reflecting the industry average a hectare. The wage rate will be the same as that paid by SAFCOL.

If the above is seen within the context of the negative environmental and social record of both the private and public forestry companies in South Africa, the conclusion is that local communities, forestry workers and environmentalists will need to make their voices heard if they wish to improve the prevailing conditions. What's clear is that the main beneficiaries of this privatization will be the large private companies. May 1999.

Resistance to tree monocultures in grasslands

Even if natural forests in South Africa do not occupy more than 300,000 hectares, this country is an important exporter of wood products. They come from pine and eucalyptus plantations that quickly expanded during the last decades. Large corporations - as SAPPI and MONDI - and the South African State itself - through SAFCOL - have been responsible for the expansion of tree monocultures in grasslands. Nowadays plantations have reached 1.5 million hectares and the powerful pulp industry intends to increase the area by 600,000 hectares more. Companies are also aiming at setting up extensive plantations in neighbouring Mozambique. In this period of globalization, MONDI is expanding abroad and in May 1996 became one of Aracruz Celulose's main shareholders.

In spite of the propaganda efforts developed by plantation companies, who are trying to show themselves as champions of nature conservation, opposition is increasing. The effects of tree monocultures, causing grasslands biodiversity reduction and water resources shortages are apparent. Air and river pollution by pulp mills has also been denounced. Small peasants are being taken over partially or totally and forced to move their cattle or even to migrate and abandon their lands. People are reacting against this invasion and in some places direct actions have been taken. In the Kwazulu Natal area, 2,825 hectares of plantations were damaged by arson, a type of action that was responsible for most plantation fires during 1997.

People are organizing and increasingly challenging the spread of plantations. TimberWatch, a South African network, is currently monitoring the expansion of plantations in that country. Another movement (SAWaC, South African Water Crisis) was formed by a group of individuals who recognize a looming water crisis in Southern Africa and are working to overcome it. SAWaC has denounced that monoculture tree plantations are one of the major causes of this crisis. They have been established mostly in the transitional areas from the coastal lowlands to the high veld, the areas of highest rainfall and very high biodiversity, thereby impacting on these two crucially important resources. July 1999.

Industrial timber plantations - asset and liability

Industrial timber plantations go under the name of forestry. This is deceiving, as it carries the image of beautiful indigenous forests. South Africa needs timber for pulp and paper manufacture, building material, furniture and many other uses, but we must not lose sight of its cost to our country. These plantations are monocultures of highly invasive, alien plants that cover vast areas of some of the most fertile land in our country.

We all know how wattles have spread across South Africa until they are one of the most destructive weeds we have. They can only be eradicated by carefully following a special programme. Pine, too, are seriously invasive, particularly in colder climates like our Drakensberg. As we drive around our country, many of the trees we see are eucalyptus that are also progressively invading the land.

At present, there are about 1.5 million hectares of industrial plantations. What is of greater concern, is that there are an estimated additional 1.6 million hectares of "jungle" invasion. Using CSIR modelling, it is estimated that the formal plantations use 1.4 trillion litres of water a year. The jungle tracts are mainly older trees and often grow in streams, so they probably use an additional two or more billion cubic metres of water a year.

The situation begs answers to at least two critical questions. Should the timber industry carry on demanding more land for plantations while our country suffers with this vast jungle invasion? Who should take responsibility for preventing the further invasion of these alien trees resulting from industrial plantations? By: Bob de Laborde. August 1999.

The Big Lie

The Tourism industry has done, and is doing much more for Responsible Environmental Management than the "forestry" industry. Maybe for this one reason only: It is rooted in Biodiversity.

Alien tree plantations destroy the indigenous vegetation they replace. The basis of the food chain destroyed, local fauna and flora can not adapt and live in a plantation. When calculating the profit associated with tree farms, is the cost of the destruction to the natural environment ever brought into consideration?

In a water stressed region, the negative effect of alien plantations manifests dramatically in the availability of water.

During the dry winter months, the indigenous vegetation is dormant, dry and bare. But the alien trees are green. Clogging the catchment, their roots penetrating deep, they use water all year round.

There is thousands of hectares of "unmanaged" plantations, invader plantations. Everywhere you go in Mpumalanga, you see loose standing pines, bluegum and wattle. Clumps of it in difficult to reach valleys. Who is responsible for this problem? Surely the responsibility lies with the plantation industry themselves.

That the industry like to refer to itself as "forestry" is misleading. A monocrop should never be called a forest.

The paperless office is becoming a global reality. It is much easier, more efficient and economic to record your decisions, relay information and communicate via the electronic medium. Is the price for pulp not going to fall in two or three decades, leaving huge alien plantations standing in many of the developing countries?

The majority of South Africa's timber farm products is being exported to fulfill the pulp need of the North. These developed countries make use of our cheap land, and cheap labor. How profitable is it to be an average plantation worker on a contractors team?

In Mpumalanga province, managed plantations occupy 615,000 hectares and the industry employs 28,000 people in the same province. That makes one person on every 22 hectares. On that same 22 hectares the rights of all other indigenous living organisms have been totally denied. Can this be called responsible?

The plantation industry will act responsibly if they commit to NO further afforestation of our remaining natural areas.

The plantation industry will act responsibly if it diversify, and spend more energy prospecting indigenous pulp alternative to Pines. Indigenous hemp is just such a example. It is much more water wise (as it is seasonal), it uses no fertilizer and it is more labor intensive. Industrial hemp is much more versatile and higher yielding.

The plantation industry would act responsibly if it uses its power derived from profit and growth to lobby government to legalize industrial hemp and experiment with this crop on their plantation degraded land. I am not suggesting that the plantation industry expand with hemp, I am suggesting that the plantation industry replace their exotic trees with indigenous hemp.

It is true that profit and growth is the reality of this world. One only needs to drive from Piet Retief to Blyde River Canyon to realize that. But in order to ensure the survival of the human race, the emphasis will have to shift to sustainable development. We have to become aware that we are an integral part of the environment, and our impact on it, affects us directly. We have to concentrate our efforts into working with the environment, minimizing our impact and raising environmental awareness in each and every individual. By: Philip Owen. September - October 1999.

What are the true costs of woodlots?

What is a woodlot? Is it a patch of land planted to trees for the purpose of supplying the fuel and timber needs of a rural community? Or is it a small portion of a giant industrial plantation, meeting the pulp and paper needs of first world industrial society?

An exact answer to these questions would help to erase the uncertainty that exists in my mind. However, clear answers have not been forthcoming, and over the past twenty years, whilst living in Zululand, I have come to these conclusions.

The conversion of grazing or other agricultural land into *Eucalyptus* plantations has been driven by the two larger timber-plantation companies in the area. In their eagerness to obtain control of suitable land for growing *Eucalyptus*, both SAPPI and Mondi embarked on a land acquisition spree in the late 1980's. Vast areas that once consisted of hundreds of independent, privately owned farms were purchased at what was then thought to be excessively high prices. These high prices were motivated by competition between the two major players and it was important to "close the gaps" that stood in the way of consolidating these farms into vast, mono-culture estates. This made it profitable for the last few farmers to hold out as long as possible, while SAPPI and Mondi battled to maintain their sources of raw material.

After acquiring the land the timber companies embarked on a course that involved firstly, removing all former farm workers and the destruction of worker accommodation. Even expensive farm-houses and buildings, such as workshops and store rooms, were bull-dozed to make way for seemingly endless tracts of gum trees (*Eucalyptus* species).

Where did the people who once lived on these farms go? Well, the white farm-owners received a great deal of money and were able to move away

to comfortable homes in the midlands of KwaZulu-Natal or the Western Cape (two provinces in South Africa) or Australia. What happened to the farm workers is anyone's guess. Over-crowding in the tribal lands made returning to these areas impossible. I suspect that most of them were left with little choice but to head for the squatter settlements of Durban (South Africa's largest harbour) or Dukuduku (an area of sub-tropical forest adjacent to the Greater St Lucia World Heritage Site) where they could eke out a living.

Once they had dealt with the problem of unwanted workers and buildings on the farms that they had purchased, the timber companies were then faced with another problem. This was the large numbers of staff that were inherited with the acquisition of the privately owned Waterton Timbers and Shell Forestry, (a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell), by SAPPI and Mondi respectively. On a single day, SAPPI retrenched more than 600 workers from its Kwa-Mbonambi operation -all in the name of "rationalisation". This meant that the company would save a lot of money through not having to pay benefits to permanent employees. The risks of "unionisation" and strike action were passed on to the contractors who were appointed to supply labour and other services at cut-throat rates. Workers, who had formerly enjoyed all the normal benefits of permanent employment, were now reduced to having to beg or bribe for casual jobs on a daily basis. To make matters worse, this was in competition with desperate informal migrants from Mozambique. Many local people simply refused to work for the offered daily rate of R12.00 (approx. 2 US dollars).

What does all of this have to do with woodlots? Particularly woodlots on community land which belongs to the Ngonyama Trust, representing His Majesty, King Goodwill Zwelethini (monarch of the Zulu people)?

Woodlots, which total thousands of hectares, but have never been subjected to planting permit applications, which the law requires.

Woodlots, which are *de facto* the property of the large plantation companies, but stand on land that they have neither purchased, nor paid any rent for.

Woodlots, grown from seedlings supplied by the timber companies concerned, yet who refuse to take responsibility for the negative social and environmental problems that they cause!

In the Sokhulu tribal area, situated to the north of Richards Bay, it is quite obvious that the dominant land use is *Eucalyptus* plantations. How did this come to be? Well, the answer is quite simple: Mondi had purchased as

much white owned land as was possible, between the towns of Gingindlovu, Babanango and Hluhluwe, yet could still not satisfy the need for wood at their mill at Richards Bay. They had no choice but to start looking at the community owned land in former Kwa-Zulu apartheid homeland.

The Mondi RDP (Reconstruction and Development) "woodlot" project has been so "successful" that hardly any land at Sokhulu remains unplanted to *Eucalyptus*. Poor SAPPI, desperate not to lose the supply of raw material needed to keep it's Mandeni and Mkomazi mills going, was forced to look further north, to the rolling grasslands of coastal Maputaland. So desperate in fact, that they even tried their luck in southern Mozambique - thankfully without success!

Reconstruction and Development cannot be served by removing peoples' means to survive in the rural environment.

So what is happening? Slowly but surely more and more land is being planted to *Eucalyptus*. More and more water is sucked out of the Earth, to create wood fibre, which is exported to destinations like Japan and Europe, at a fraction of its true cost. A "privileged" minority appears to benefit from the sale of timber to Mondi and Sappi, but for the vast majority of members of traditional communities it means the end to the natural resources upon which they relied for survival. Grazing for cattle and goats has disappeared under the spreading plantations. The loss of surface water has ruined prospects of growing food crops and people's traditional lifestyle has been left in tatters. Where will these people go? Well, some may move to informal settlements around towns in the area, but many more have moved to the squatter-cities around Durban. Here the people can taste the benefits of "civilised society".

Breathe the rotten air, polluted by factories, freeways and landfill sites! Roam the streets, scratching in waste-bins and sniff glue for pleasure! Become economically active in the lucrative crime and prostitution industry! Give their kids Coca-Cola and GE chips for lunch.

Thank you SAPPI, thank you Mondi for your great contribution to the Reconstruction and Development of South Africa!

It must be admitted that there are other culprits. South Africa's Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has failed to recognise the monstrous problems arising from the proliferation of so-called woodlots, using nice-sounding names like "community forestry " which is hardly the case. December 1999.

Just poetry and emotion?

The expansion of the tree plantation model in South Africa has given place to a heated debate. Philip Owen, from SAWAC (South African Water Crisis), as well as several other concerned people, have repeatedly argued that the plantations scheme is detrimental to grassland and water conservation, thus negative with regard to rural communities. Last month Philip received a letter as a response to some comments he had made on an article entitled "Timber Farmers Praise Paper Giant", related to a tree plantation project by SAPPI -called Project Grow- in Kwa-Zulu Natal, which was published in *The Citizen* on November 18th 1999. Among other things, the reply stated that plantations do not make the land useless for growing vegetables, and that cattle grazing is to be seen in the project area. According to the author of the letter, only incomes from sugar farming can exceed those obtained from tree planting in the region. "What is needed are science-based practical solutions for practical problems, not poetry and emotion!" concluded the letter.

This is the core of Philip's answer, which counters such arguments:

"I will go visit the area concerned. I would like to speak to the tribal authorities. Finances allowing, I will visit them again ten years down the line, I will visit them again twenty years down the line, I will visit them again thirty years down the line, and I will see if my fears are justified. If Mpumalanga is anything to judge by, well, You can not argue, that animals find little nourishment under plantations. I saw the wild horses at Kaapsehoop the other day, the way their grazing areas have been affected by plantations in the area they are forced to graze next to the road. I would like people to realize that the "derelict land" referred to in the article has value, and properly looked after and cared for, can provide abundantly. When you talk about plantations and sugar being the industries of "highest financial returns", for whom do you mean?"

I believe the plantation model is wrong for South Africa. I will try to enforce a moratorium on new plantations, and in the face of reasonable serious 'opposition', will use any means at my disposal. For myself, I don't need studies and books to be convinced as to the negative effects of tree farming. I just need to take a walk up the mountain." January 2000.

Grassland ecosystem destruction by tree plantations

South Africa boasts an area of 1.5 million hectares of tree plantations, mostly composed of eucalyptus and pine trees, as well as a lesser area of Australian wattle. These plantations have resulted in an important number of social and environmental impacts, most of which were highlighted during a symposium held in June 2000 in Pietermaritzburg, organized by the local NGO coalition Timberwatch.

Even though conservation efforts worldwide have been mostly focused on tropical ecosystems, it is to be underscored that grasslands, typical of the temperate areas, present high levels of biodiversity and endemism.

Most of the impacts of tree plantations in South Africa are common to numerous countries throughout the world. However, the country has its own specificities - South Africa contains almost 10% of the world's total known bird, fish and plant species, and over 6% of the world's mammal and reptile species - of which perhaps one of the least common is that plantations are occupying native grasslands. In this case, plantations are not a cause of deforestation through substitution of forests by plantations. Many people might therefore see these plantations as having less negative impacts than those implemented in forest areas. But they would be wrong. As Professor Braam van Wyk - one of South Africa's most respected botanists - clearly demonstrated in his presentation at the Timberwatch Symposium, tree plantations are destroying South Africa's native grasslands, which are one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on Earth, thus being a major factor of plant biodiversity loss. At the same time, those grasslands are the home of an enormous number of animal species, which are increasingly disappearing together with the grasslands they depend upon.

South Africa is therefore an exception to the rule (as are Argentina and Uruguay), in the sense that its main problem is not deforestation but afforestation. South Africa is not "planting forests" - as foresters like to portray their large-scale tree planting activities - but destroying grasslands that have evolved through millions of years. Such destruction is taking place in two ways: 1) Through large-scale monoculture tree plantations and 2) Through the invasion of alien tree species into the grasslands.

In South Africa, tree plantations are implemented on a very large scale, and are concentrated in the higher rainfall areas of the provinces of Kwazulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. Few plant species are able to survive

under the tree canopy and therefore few animal species are able to find food in them. At the same time, other conditions for survival and reproduction of wildlife become so modified by plantations, that many animals are forced to migrate in order to survive. Some of them are able to adapt to different environments and therefore manage to survive, though in smaller numbers. Others don't find the necessary conditions and disappear. Moreover, fire frequency is reduced in any natural grassland that may remain among plantations. Since the grasslands and their associated fauna are fire-adapted, regular burning is essential for maintaining their full biotic diversity.

As stated above, South Africa has 1.5 million hectares of plantations. Additionally, it has 1.6 million hectares of what local people call "jungle gum" and "jungle wattle". These "jungles" consist of a number of alien tree species which have invaded the grasslands and are creating havoc throughout the country. Although the predominant species gives them their name ("gum" is the generic term used for eucalyptus and "wattle" for several species of Australian acacia, notably *Acacia mearnsii* and *A. dealbata*), they are composed of a large number of invasive species, which are spreading in both grasslands and forest (which is very limited in extent in Southern Africa). *Eucalyptus globulus* and *E. grandis* (from Australia), *Pinus patula* and *P. elliottii* (from Mexico and the US respectively), *Melia azedarach* (from Asia), *Solanum mauritianum* and *Lantana camara* (from temperate South America), *Jacaranda mimosifolia* (from subtropical South America) and many others are occupying increasing areas and negatively affecting plant and animal diversity, as well as causing a reduction in the availability of water in rivers and streams.

Invasion of habitats by alien plants is one of the causes of the extinction of native species. Some plant species have developed the capacity to adapt to new sites and to displace the original vegetation cover. This phenomenon has been widely recorded and it is known as "bioinvasion". Needless to say that invasive species constitute a threat for biodiversity at the local and regional level, since the spread of newcomers alters the richness and abundance of the flora and fauna of the original ecosystem.

All the above problems are the result of the introduction of tree species to a country dominated by grasslands. Such mistake could be understandable in the past, but today - when the world has declared its concern over biodiversity loss and governments have made commitments to address the problem - it becomes unforgivable. In South Africa, much

of the blame lies within forestry companies and the forestry professional community. Will grasslands be saved or will the whole country become a "jungle"? Given the vested interests at stake, much will depend on the work of civil society organizations and the government to put a halt to the spread of plantations and to find viable solutions to the already created problems. June 2000.

Quo vadis FSC?

Certification of monoculture timber plantations as "sustainably managed forests" by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) makes an absolute mockery of the concept of sustainable environment and ecosystem management.

In recent years vast tracts of industrial tree plantations in South Africa and many other countries, have been given the FSC stamp of approval.

How can this be possible? The natural vegetation in the areas where these plantations have been established was originally highly bio-diverse grassland or woodland. After conversion to plantations, these areas stand little chance, if any, of being able to revert to the natural climax vegetation type. The environment is subjected to a terrifying range of harmful impacts, starting with the construction of primitive roads and ending with huge, computerised mechanical harvesters compacting the soil, thereby destroying its function.

In between these environmentally catastrophic events, the land and its rightful inhabitants are subjected to an extensive suite of chemical, physical, biological and demographic alterations to their natural state. This all as part of the process that is imposed to meet the demands of first world greed for wood-fibre products:

1 - As a first step, the natural vegetation is either bulldozed or killed with herbicides to prevent competition with alien plantation trees for water, light and nutrients.

2 - Alien tree saplings are artificially fertilised to speed up their rate of establishment and other unnatural chemicals that absorb moisture are added to the soil to prevent the young plants from drying out.

3 - Spills of herbicides, insecticides, diesel fuel, engine oil and other human trash enter the natural environment without invitation.

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- 4 - Alien invasive plants carried as seeds on vehicle tyres and worker's boots become established in the vacuum created by the destruction of the natural groundcover.
 - 5 - Plantation contractors do not normally provide appropriate toilet facilities for their workers. This facilitates the appearance of cholera in the eastern region of South Africa.
 - 6 - Contract workers are poorly paid and have little choice but to build makeshift homes within areas of natural forest near the plantation sites where they work, causing substantial ecological damage in the process.
 - 7 - Animals and birds that are disturbed by the plantation establishment activities either flee the area or are hunted and snared as food for the contract workers.
 - 8 - Local people who would have had access to the area if plantations had not been established, could have used the area to graze their cattle and sheep, harvest thatch grass for roofing their homes, and collect food and medicinal plants for their own limited use. They are now deprived of this resource and are forced to move into previously undisturbed areas in search of these commodities. This often leads to conflict with the management of protected natural areas.
 - 9 - Surface water in the vicinity of new plantations is soon depleted and is usually only evident during the rainy season. People have to turn to the use of boreholes and wells that often are saline, or polluted with bacteria from pit toilets.
 - 10 - Timber plantation contract workers are commonly unmarried men from other parts of the country and to a large extent from neighbouring countries. This can often lead to the problem of women in local communities being sexually harassed. Outcomes of this situation include unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and destroyed relationships. There is a high likelihood that the increasing incidence of HIV infection in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) can be attributed in part to the employment practices of the timber plantation industry.
 - 11 - Contract workers add a new dimension to local health care needs. Those that are recruited from remote rural parts of neighbouring states can be carriers of diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. Coincidentally both these diseases have been increasing proportionately during the period that industrial timber plantations have been expanding (over the last 15 to 20 years).

12 - The loss of beneficial soil organisms in timber plantations has been well documented. Monocultures are inherently prone to the rapid spread of pathogens. Natural buffers that are present in bio-diverse ecosystems cannot be replicated in the timber monoculture environment.

13 - The establishment of timber plantations upsets the natural balance of species. These plantations create barriers that disrupt the normal migration and breeding patterns of birds, animals and insects.

14 - Community food security is one of the first victims of timber plantations. Areas used traditionally for growing fruit and vegetables become too dry or are shaded out when plantations are established too close to the fertile areas along streams and rivers. The remaining residents are left in a position where they have to use their limited financial resources (usually state pensions) to buy processed food from trading stores.

15 - Transport systems, especially roads, are subjected to high levels of usage for which they were not designed. The cost of upgrading or maintaining rural roads is usually borne by the state, which means that the timber industry benefits from an indirect subsidy.

16 - Negative effects on non-timber neighbouring farms are numerous. In much the same way as genetically engineered food crops will pollute fields of nearby non-GMO or organic crops, there are off-site impacts that undermine the economic viability of other farmers. These include an increase in alien invasive plants, loss of ground water, increased crime and poaching and the disruption of normal pasture management by burning, due to the risk of fire spreading to the timber plantations,

Large-scale timber plantations destroy whole ecosystems and rural economies. For some strange reason this calamity is virtually ignored by governments and research institutions. The onus should be on an organisation like FSC to insist that thorough, impartial research is conducted before certification can be considered.

In place of the natural landscape is a new visage dominated by fake forests. Fake not only in that their owners pretend that they can substitute meaningfully for the real thing, but truly fake in terms of how their economic benefits are exaggerated and inflated at the local level.

There is no doubt that a consumer commodity like paper, or pressboard, has great value in modern society. What is not acceptable is that the rate of consumption of paper products is increasing whilst the living standards

of poor communities where the timber is produced do not. The growth of the throwaway culture of so-called developed countries has a direct correlation to the eroding natural environment, and standards of living in the countries that have been colonised by the tree plantations of the multinational corporations concerned.

The FSC must take a large share of the responsibility for this social and environmental injustice.

Plantations are not forests!!! By: Wally Menne. April 2001.

The sad figures of employment generated by plantation companies

One of the most commonly used arguments by those promoting large scale monoculture tree plantations is that they generate employment. As we will see from the following examples, such arguments are false.

Let us look at the multinational company Aracruz Celulose, based in Brazil. Presently the company owns 144,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in the States of Espirito Santo and Bahia. According to the data to be found in its own web page (www.aracruz.com.br) if we add up the hectares of plantations and the hectares of native forest, this company owns a total of 210,000 hectares of land. It also states in its web page that it has a total of 4,643 employees (of which 1,689 are direct and 2,954 permanently indirect).

Using the rule of three, we find that this company occupies 3.2 employees for every 100 hectares of plantations it owns. If we were to include the total land belonging to Aracruz, the statistic is even sadder: 2.2 employees for each 100 hectares of land. However, this figure is misleading in regard to employment generated at rural level, as it includes employees in the pulp mill and another series of employees in areas far from the plantations. Therefore, at rural level, it employs far fewer people.

Let us look at another example from a neighbouring country, Uruguay. The multinational company Weyerhaeuser from the United States owns a total of 128,000 hectares of land in this country, of which 71,000 are planted with trees. According to declarations to the press by the company's Vice-President, "today some 600 people are linked to the company. A total of 130 people work directly for the company."

Let us go back to the figures: the company generates 0.18 jobs per 100 hectares planted. If we were to use the figure of the total lands belonging to the multinational company, this would drop to 0.10 jobs per 100 hectares. Contrary to the case of Aracruz, in this case the company does not carry out any industrial transformation, better reflecting the scant level of employment generated by tree plantations. It is interesting to note that the Uruguayan Forestry Department maintains in its advertising, that this activity generates 3.3 jobs per 100 hectares. As we do not think that the company is hiding employees, the conclusion is clear: the Forestry Department is not telling the truth.

Let us now see a South African example: the multinational company MONDI, which is also one of the main shareholders of Aracruz Celulose. This company has a total of 638,000 hectares of land. Of this total, 407,000 hectares are plantations. In turn the company - again according to data in its web site - has 4,500 employees. Once again the results we obtain regarding employment generated by these multinational companies are low: in the case of MONDI, it is 1.1 employee per 100 planted hectares. If we consider the total hectares belonging to MONDI, the figure drops to 0.7 jobs per 100 hectares. And this in spite of the fact that MONDI also includes the figures of employees in its industrial sector, which shows a situation similar to that of Aracruz regarding the scarce generation of rural employment.

To this should be added the low quality of the jobs generated by these companies at the rural level, with low salaries, poor conditions of housing, food and social security, abusive sub-hiring systems, temporary jobs, etc. Prospects look even worse with the increasing mechanisation of plantation and harvest, always resulting in a decreasing number of jobs.

Summing up, although there may be some exceptions to the rule, in practice it may be seen that plantation companies do not fulfil their promises of generating employment and, on the contrary, make the situation even worse than it was before their arrival, increasing rural to urban migration. September 2001.

Where impact of plantations on water is accepted as fact

The establishment of large-scale fast growing tree monocrops is always accompanied by a debate on the issue of water. The vast majority of forestry experts will deny that plantations impact on water, usually using

the lack of scientific studies as an argument to counter local peoples' allegations that plantations deplete water resources.

Within that context, South Africa is an exception, because no-one denies that plantations affect water resources and what is more interesting is that this unanimity is based on research carried out over many years.

As the majority of South Africa's commercial timber plantations have been established in the prime water catchments of the region this has had severe consequences on the available water supply and more specifically on downstream users. Concerns over the impact of these commercial tree plantations on existing water supplies were first articulated in the early 20th century. The extent and public nature of the discourse eventually led to the introduction of a state sponsored hydrological research programme in 1936. Despite the growing body of evidence that illustrated quite clearly that water supplies declined in the presence of commercially grown tree plantations it was only in 1972 that a regulatory regime (Afforestation Permit System) was introduced. The state now sought to regulate the planting of commercial tree plantations through the issuing of permits to mitigate the deleterious impact such plantings have on water supplies.

In subsequent years the inherent shortcomings of the 1972 regulatory regime became increasingly apparent. Although a series of recommendations based on the growing body of evidence gathered from additional research had been introduced, these resulted in few substantial changes. It was only during the rapidly evolving and changing political environment of the 1990s that more significant changes were introduced to regulate the tree-growing sector. The underlying motive for the state intervening in the sector was to ensure that South Africa's scarce water supplies were utilised more equitably, effectively and efficiently. Any activities, including tree-growing, that resulted in the reduction of water supplies were to be registered as Stream Flow Reduction activities and would have to apply for a permit to continue pursuing such activities. Additional concerns such as the impact of commercial tree-growing on biodiversity, ecological sustainability, and aesthetics were also taken into consideration.

Although the results of the hydrological research used to establish the legislative framework for tree-growing activities have often been queried, any disputes that have arisen have focused more on the alleged quantities of water consumed by the industry rather than the fact that commercial tree plantations are major users of water and especially groundwater. The essence of the 'plantation-water' debate in South Africa

therefore is more about an industry arguing for its economic right to compete for a scarce resource, namely water, rather than a denial by the industry that commercial tree plantations consume a significant amount of water. In other words its is an accepted 'fact' rather than a 'fallacy'.

Forestry experts and governments in other countries where large-scale fast growing tree plantations and being promoted and implemented should follow the example of South Africa instead of continuing to deny what is increasingly obvious: that these plantations deplete water resources. September 2001.

Tree plantations' impacts on bird populations

South Africa (including South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland)) has been blessed with 40 or so endemic bird species. Twelve of these are endemic to the Grassland Biome, while nine of those are listed as globally threatened or near threatened by BirdLife International. Rudd's Lark is the only species occurring in South Africa to be listed as Critically Threatened on a global scale.

All the endemic grassland birds listed above occur in the high altitude, moist grassland of the eastern escarpment. These grasslands have been listed as an Endemic Bird Area by BirdLife International, i.e. an area containing at least two species whose global distribution falls within an area smaller than 50 000 km². Other threatened birds that occur in this area include Blue Swallow, Blue Crane, Wattled Crane - all listed as globally threatened - and Grey Crowned Crane which is now listed as Nationally Threatened.

Most South African tree plantations have been planted in what were formerly high altitude, moist grasslands containing all or many of the species mentioned above. This has had a devastating effect on the bird life of these areas. A glance at the distribution maps in the Southern African Bird Atlas and any field guide to southern African birds for Rudd's Lark, for example, indicates how the range of this species has become fragmented. Blue Swallows, often cited as proof of the Timber Industry's concern for the environment, is now down to between 40 and 50 pairs left breeding in South Africa - less than 10% of the original population. The near extinction of this species in South Africa has been laid almost solely at the door of the Timber Industry.

A study using Southern African Bird Atlas Data, illustrated the effect that tree plantations had on these species in particular and bird life in general. The grassland birds themselves became locally extinct in heavily planted areas. Even in relatively lightly planted areas there was a negative impact on bird diversity in general.

Unpublished data collected in the grasslands of southern Mpumalanga indicates that the diversity of bird species in the near pristine grasslands around Wakkerstroom is around 170 species/km². As one nears the intensely farmed areas around Amersfoort (mainly maize farming) the bird diversity drops to around 120 species/km². In the areas around Panbult which have been heavily planted to trees the density drops to around 90 species/km². Perhaps more significantly the composition of the bird communities changes from one dominated by larks, pipits and cisticolas to one dominated by doves and canaries.

The above information clearly shows that plantation forestry in South Africa is having a major impact on the country's rich biodiversity, resulting from the substitution of native grasslands with tree crops. Although this article focuses on birds, the impacts are much more far reaching, including threats to most grassland-related flora and fauna - in a country where grasslands are one of the most important ecosystems. South African corporations are not "planting forests" - as they like to portray themselves - they are destroying the country's biodiversity, highly dependent on its native grasslands. February 2002.

FAO forest definition a threat to biodiversity

Wally Menne, a member of the South African Timberwatch Coalition, sent the following message to Magnus Grylle of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):

"The information given [by the FAO] in respect of the total area covered by forest in South Africa is misleading as there are probably more than 3 million hectares of alien monoculture industrial timber plantations and thickets included in your total of 8.9 million ha. In fact, a more accurate figure for actual forest would be 4.5 million ha. Industrial timber plantations are a temporary crop with rotations of 7-20 years and an average of about 10. They destroy indigenous culture and biodiversity, displace communities, and irreversibly degrade the land. It is dishonest to pretend that they are forests."

Magnus Grylle answered:

"Thank you for your input. We are of course much aware of the plantations in South Africa. For the global accounting, we include them in the term "Forest" which has, given the context, a precise definition.

See: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/fo/fra/index.jsp> and
http://www.fao.org/forestry/fo/fra/defin.jsp?lang_id=1&parent=978

This definition does not take into account the quality (which can be perceived very differently depending on the point of view). It is simply a gross value for "areas with trees", if using a very loose explanation. This gross value can be used as is, for instance for carbon balance calculations, or be broken down for more specialised analysis. Themes for these more specialized analyses can be "naturalness", "wood supply capacity", or any other. For each purpose, the overall Forest could be broken down into more precise categories. What to call the categories is up to the analyst.

I hope this clarifies our position. Forest plantations are areas with trees, and therefore a (kind of) forest.

Best regards, Magnus Grylle".

It seems that according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), even when every last patch of forest has been destroyed, there will be nothing to worry about, as long as there were timber plantations to take their place.

It does not even appear to matter that the areas previously covered by forest are left to degrade into wastelands of alien weeds. It also does not matter that vast areas of land that were formerly grasslands, wetlands, pastures and food farms are converted into industrial timber plantations.

After all, what is important is that there should be sufficient trees on the earth, to be able to show the plebs and the politicians that nothing has changed; that there are still the same areas of 'forest', 'deforestation' has slowed right down (don't tell people that there is very little left to de-forest). In fact, in many parts of the world there is an increase in forest cover!

In South Africa there is a growing uneasiness with the simplistic view of forests taken by the FAO. Our forests are amongst the most complex and diverse in the world - this in spite of their historical abuse at the hands of human settlers. The forests that have survived are those in more remote

areas, where human pressure has been in balance with their capacity to regenerate. But this is changing fast as local population pressure combined with demand for resources from first world nations starts to mount.

Paradoxically, the timber plantations that were expected to be the saviour of South Africa's forests (by providing alternative sources of timber to local consumers and taking pressure off indigenous species) have become the greatest threat to biodiversity in this country. This is not to say that timber plantations do not play an important role in the local economy. There is legitimate cause for the cultivation of exotic tree species in South Africa, and it can be argued that they have played a role in preventing the further exploitation of our forest resources. This is all very well in the context of meeting local demand for timber products, but what has happened is that production has expanded to a level far above local demand. Recent figures show that exports of timber plantation products (mostly raw logs, chips and pulp) are now more or less on a par with local consumption (mostly end products such as construction timber, furniture, paper and board).

The ways in which plantations have contributed to the degeneration of the natural environment are many and complex. Some negative impacts on biodiversity are only felt much later, and then quite far away from the event that caused the impact. So-called downstream impacts are usually ignored when assessing environmental costs, yet they can accumulatively cause major devastation in natural ecosystems.

The Dukuduku Forest, which is part of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park World Heritage Site, is a case in point. An estimated 30,000 people settled in the forest between 1990 and 2000, at the same time as timber companies were aggressively expanding their interests in the area. Not only were they buying up farms that previously engaged in varied agricultural activities, and combining them into large timber estates, but there was a concerted drive to establish 'woodlots' in communally owned tribal lands nearby. Both of these ways of increasing the supplies of timber for their hungry pulp and paper mills, led to the displacement of thousands of farm workers and rural poor.

To make matters worse, the timber companies embarked on 'rationalisation' programmes that resulted in the retrenchment of thousands of plantation workers. In a single day, SAPPI retrenched more than 600 workers at their Kwa-mbonambi operation. Permanent workers were replaced with contractors, who could employ people on a temporary

basis without having to provide normal employment benefits. Many illegal immigrants from countries such as Mozambique were attracted to this kind of employment, as it was possible to get money to take back to their families without questions being asked. A combination of all of the above actions created a situation where poor contract workers (paid about 1 US dollar a day), were left with little choice but to make their homes inside the forest, and to supplement their meagre income by cutting down or burning the forest to open up areas where they could grow food or Cannabis.

The more easily measured direct impacts of timber plantations are also often disregarded, especially in the case of community land, where the companies are effectively obtaining the free use of land, without any of the responsibilities associated with ownership. Loss of grassland and wetland vegetation to plantations leads to the loss of grazing for cattle and sheep. Associated with this loss is the negative effect of fast growing plantations on the water table. Sources of water such as streams, springs and seasonal pans often disappear after plantations are established. Not only does this affect people and their livestock, but it also has serious implications for the natural species diversity of the area.

As wetland areas dry out, wetland species become locally extinct. There are many areas that have not been thoroughly surveyed, yet are being transformed before this can happen. It is quite possible that species that have not been recorded are being lost without our knowledge.

Displacement of people from their land creates a situation where alternatives must be found. In the same period that plantations have spread through rural areas, there has been a marked increase in the number of people leaving their rural homes to try to find work in the cities, and living wherever they can find vacant land to erect a temporary home. For many who were not prepared to give up their traditional lifestyle, it has meant having to take their livestock into areas where they can browse rather than graze, and this usually means sensitive riparian zones along rivers and streams. To get to water to drink, cattle open up paths on steep banks, which in turn lead to soil erosion problems.

The indirect effects of plantations on nearby natural areas has never been properly researched and quantified. Perhaps the FAO will consider providing the funds to do this research.

Direct impacts of timber plantations on biodiversity could fill several volumes, but available space and time mean that only the major ones can be included here.

The most obvious and possibly the worst effect of plantations has been their tendency to spread beyond the area where they were originally planted, or to re-appear in areas where plantations were discontinued. The invasive tendency of exotic tree plantation species has had devastating effects on vast areas of this country. The worst is the Australian Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), but Eucalyptus species and hybrids have also made a major contribution to the problem. Although there are government-coordinated programs to eradicate alien trees, especially in sensitive catchments, the damage to biodiversity has already been done. Herbicide sprays and other applications form a substantial part of the process used, and it is not properly understood what the effects of the use of these chemicals will be on native species. It has been reported that these efforts have failed in some areas due to poor methods or management as well as inadequate follow-up.

Emerging from the above is a picture of timber plantations causing both direct and indirect damage to the natural environment. By extension, this damage must extend to a substantial loss of biodiversity.

Managed plantations in this country cover an area greater than 1,7 million ha. And most of these have been established on species diverse grasslands and wetlands. It has been estimated that land that has been invaded by alien tree species, or left unmanaged after being used for plantations, amounts to more than 1,5 million ha, mainly in grassland areas, but also significantly in wetlands and riverine areas.

Is it right to call these artificial impositions on the landscape 'forests'? No matter what arguments are presented by the FAO, it is clearly a problem to make the inference that tree plantations are a "kind of forest". By the same token it could be claimed that locusts are a 'kind of bird' or that cornfields are a 'kind of Prairie'. Clearly this is ludicrous to say the least, so why is the FAO determined to obfuscate the true nature of timber plantations?

The most obvious reason is political. Southern nations are supposedly independent, and have sovereignty over their people and resources. Or do they?

Coupled with the neo-colonialist farce is the perceived need to maintain 'standards' in the first world. It makes so much sense when you can call timber products from industrial plantations 'products of sustainably managed forests'!

Thank you very much, developed nations of the North - you can keep your euphemisms and your plantations. We want our grasslands and our forests. By: Wally Menne. March 2002.

TANZANIA

Preservation results in human rights abuses

The preservationist approach to forest protection tends to consider people as a threat to nature protection and frequently results in the violation of the human rights of rural communities and indigenous peoples living in the forests. This view not only supports the unrealistic idea of a nature void of people, but also ignores the benefits that the traditional management of natural resources brings to nature conservation itself. Over the last few years, conflicts related to this issue have arisen in several places and the following case is yet another sad result of such approach.

In October 1998 riot police and forest officers entered the village of Nzasa at the Kazizumbwi Forest Reserve, 45 kilometres from Dar es Salaam. They beat them, burned their crops and houses. Hundreds of structures, mainly thatched residential houses and granaries, were pulled down and burned during the operation. At least 700 people - including women and children - were left homeless, evicted out of the area and with no other place to go to.

The Forest Department, heavily criticized by human rights groups, justified the violent operation arguing that the villagers had encroached upon the forest reserve and are not entitled to compensation. After the operation, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism told the press that the government would not extend any assistance to the victims, as the area was not recognized as a village, and made the villagers responsible for the destruction of 54% of the forest reserve. Said Abdallah, one of the victims, told the press that members of his lineage had been living in the area since the beginning of the century. "Yet government agents say we have invaded the reserve" he added. The villagers say authorities had brought the forest boundary inland by at least "three hours walk". Investigations carried out by members of the press revealed that indeed every landmark in the area is new.

The victims of the abuse recently reacted suing the authorities for this violent action. The villagers argue that the so called "Okoa Kazimzumbwi Operation" was criminal, because the government agents entered their

homes unlawfully, harmed and assaulted them, and burned their crops. The villagers also argue that authorities changed the reserve boundaries after the assault in order to accuse them of having invaded it. The case is now before the High Court. June 1999.

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. September - October 1999.

Afforestation, reforestation and the real causes of forest destruction

News from that country say that the government has launched an ambitious national tree planting campaign aimed at "re-greening" the country by planting 100 million trees. To the official viewpoint, forest destruction is particularly alarming in the rural areas where traditional shifting cultivation and livestock keeping are practiced.

Thousands of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi have migrated to Tanzania to escape from the situation of extreme violence resulting from the conflicts that affect their respective countries. The authorities have recently urged Burundian refugees in the western region of Kigoma to stop felling trees and instead join the government's green campaign. Like their Tanzanian hosts, the refugees rely heavily on wood fuel for their daily energy requirements, since wood is by far the most important source of energy in that country, as is common in Africa.

The government's initiative deserves some comments. It is not clear if the government is envisaging a reforestation or an afforestation campaign. The difference is essential, since the former means that areas that used to be covered by forest will be planted with native species, aiming at the rehabilitation of the original ecosystem, while the latter consists of the plantation of exotic trees, usually fast-growing species. The social and environmental consequences of the two approaches are totally different and there is therefore a need for clarification on the matter. Secondly, the official analysis of the causes of deforestation seems to be clearly biased against the poor. While the emphasis is put on shifting agriculture, grazing and the use of firewood by local people and refugees, nothing is said about the intensification of export crop production in semiarid areas - which has led to soil erosion and desertification processes - or about illegal commercial logging - the main cause of deforestation in the country - which is linked to corruption within its own agencies and officials. December 1999.

Local people benefit from forest products

Corruption and incapacity among forestry officials, as well as the activity of illegal loggers, timber product dealers and sawmillers are responsible for the disappearance and degradation of Tanzania's forests. This not only means the destruction of a valuable ecosystem in a tropical region but

also the loss of the source of resources and incomes for forest dwellers and forest dependent people.

A recent research performed by G.C. Monela, G.C. Kajembe, A.R.S. Kaoneka, and G. Kowero of the Sokaine University of Agriculture shows that honey, charcoal, fuelwood, and wild fruits contribute with 58% of farmers' cash incomes in six villages from the Dodoma region, the peri-urban area near Morogoro, and the Kilosa District. Those results, together with findings from a rapid rural appraisal conducted in the same location, are presented in the book "Household Livelihood Strategies in the Miombo Woodlands, Emerging Trends".

Honey alone accounted for one third of all cash income in those villages. Farmers in the peri-urban area, which had greater access to markets, produced more charcoal, which represented 38% of their total cash income. Women have increasingly become involved in many of these activities, particularly in the peri-urban area.

The results from this study confirm the findings of a previous survey of seven administrative regions (conducted by Munishi et al.), that found that two thirds of all Tanzanian households obtained at least 15% of their incomes from forest products. Both studies make clear how important traditional forest knowledge and practices are for the survival and well being of local communities. They also show once again that forests are not only a source of roundwood for a few companies, but a rich source of products that can benefit local people. January 2000.

Another case of Norwegian "CO2lonialism"

A project implemented in Uganda by Norwegian company Tree Farms to set up between 80,000 and 100,000 hectares of plantations of pines and eucalyptus to act as carbon sinks has been severely questioned because of its negative social and environmental consequences. It has been defined as a "loss-loss-loss" situation, where the profits for the company are doubtful, local peasant communities are losing their lands and working for miser salaries, and Uganda is losing its sovereignty in relation to the management of its territory and natural resources.

In a report published in July 2000, a project also managed by Tree Farms - this time in neighbouring Tanzania - is analyzed ("Carbon Upsets. Norwegian 'Carbon Plantations' in Tanzania" by Jorn Stave, NorWatch). So far Escarpment Forestry Company Ltd., subsidiary of Tree Farms, has

planted 1,900 hectares of *Pinus patula* and *Eucalyptus saligna* at Sao Hill, Mufindi and Kilombero districts in the Tanzanian highlands. The company is in the process of acquiring larger areas. Additionally it is funding the activities of TAGGAT (Tanzania Greenhouse Gas Action Trust), a foundation that is working with the company in the development of simulation models for carbon fixation in tree biomass.

Even though this project differs in several aspects to that implemented by the same company in Uganda, the research concludes that this is another case of "CO₂lonialism" provoking negative impacts on the environment, local communities and Tanzania as a country. Local biodiversity - including two orchids and one Aloe species endangered - will be affected by tree monocultures. At the same time, the fate of carbon content of soils and roots of natural vegetation once plantations are set up is uncertain. Even though Tree Farms made consultations with local villagers before works began, it has used local work force for plantations hiring them by a salary well below the official recommended minimum wage. Moreover, there are still more than 100 workers with several months of pay outstanding. The sum the company is paying as annual rent to the Tanzanian government for land use (US\$ 1.9 per hectare) is lower than the rent at Tree Farm's project in Uganda. Nevertheless, the Norwegians are pushing the authorities in order to reduce the rent by as much as 50%. At the same time, Tanzania will lose control of the leased land during a period of 99 years.

The activities of Tree Farms in Tanzania can be considered as even worse than those in Uganda, since in this case the company is expected to make huge profits taking advantage of the very low negotiation power of local communities and the scarce institutional development of the Tanzanian state. Since the "carbon market" implies an absurd trade between agents with very different power, it is not surprising that the more powerful and richer gain while the more feeble and poorer loose. Definitely carbon sinks are not a solution for climate change, but an additional problem, both at the global and the local levels. September 2000.

Gold mining adds new problems to Lake Victoria

The Tanzanian territory embraces a wide variety of landscapes, including mountains, savanna, bushlands and forests. Some 53,000 square kilometres of the country comprises lakes, being Lake Victoria the biggest

one. With an area of 69,490 square kilometres Lake Victoria is the world's second largest freshwater lake. It is an essential resource for the life of the surrounding region, which has one of Africa's highest population densities. Farming, fishing and boatbuilding are the most significant economic activities that directly depend on the lake.

The ecological health of Lake Victoria has been deeply affected by a combination of degrading processes of different nature, such as the clearance of natural vegetation along the shores, a booming fish-export industry, the disappearance of several fish species, the eutrophication of the water body, and the dumping of untreated effluents by several industries. Traditional lifestyles of lakeshore communities have been disrupted and it is feared that together with the degradation of the lake they could disappear.

This sad story goes back to the first decades of the 20th century, when the British colonialists started to exploit Lake Victoria's watershed, and continued after the political independence of the country in 1963. During colonial times the surrounding forests were cut down, and the swamps that were part of this complex hydrologic system drained. Cash crops, such as tea, coffee and sugar, were planted instead. Over the years they have grown in size and number. Since these crops are based on Green Revolution agriculture, a significant portion of the chemicals used are washed into rivers during the rainy season, and end up in the lake, causing eutrophication and providing nutrients for algae bloom, which completely alters the dynamics of the whole water body.

The exaggerated growth of the economic activities in the lake and its surrounding area has overcome the carrying capacity of the ecosystem. Not only the surrounding lands but also the water body in itself is subject to overexploitation. With the introduction of modern fishing methods, overfishing has become a problem and catch sizes have dropped. A survey of the lake carried out in 1980 revealed a total reverse in biomass composition. As a consequence the populations of smaller fish, which traditionally have been the source of livelihood for nearby communities, have been decimated by larger predators and overfishing.

Polluting industries - from textile and leather-tanning to paper mills and breweries - located near the lake, constitute another cause for the present situation. A recent study shows that industrial plants located in the Tanzanian territory produce daily two million litres of untreated sewage and industrial waste that flow into the lake.

To add to the problem, last June a new and extremely polluting activity began in the region: gold mining. The companies involved are Ashanti Goldfields of Ghana and AngloGold of South Africa. Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa himself, who inaugurated the Geita Gold Mine, the biggest one in East Africa, located 20 kilometres away from the southern shore of Lake Victoria, even pledged more incentives for investments in the sector.

Environmentalists from Tanzania and Uganda have clearly expressed their opposition to gold mining, and warned that there is a high risk that sodium cyanide, a strong poison used to extract gold from ore, might leak into the lake through the rivers and cause an additional negative effect to the already affected water system. Concerned voices from the academic sector in both countries have also harshly criticized the Tanzanian government for supporting a project that would jeopardize the environment of the lake and the lives of communities living around it. I has been underscored that mining in the region will also bring negative consequences for the region and the country's economy, since the European Union is about to ban all fish imports from East Africa because of the presence of toxic elements in the fishes' bodies. October 2000.

Human rights, social justice and conservation

Efforts to conserve certain threatened species or habitats have in too many cases been implemented at the expense of local peoples throughout the world. Although modern conservation thinking has been shifting away from its original anti-people bias, it has yet to redress many of its past abuses and to accept that people are part of the environment. The following quotes from the conclusions of a study on Tanzania carried out by Neumann, may prove useful to that debate:

"The establishment of virtually every national park in Tanzania required either the outright removal of rural communities or, at the very least, the curtailment of access to lands and resources. The historical processes of colonialism and postcolonial nation-building thus shaped the basic relationship between peasant farmers and pastoralists and the conservation regime. From the perspective of pastoralist political activists, numerous injustices have been carried out by the state in the name of wildlife conservation. The fact that pastoralist voices speaking out against conservation as usual are now heard loudly at international conferences and workshops is in itself a remarkable historical shift in Tanzania's

conservation politics. Rural activists have incorporated the potent rhetoric of sustainable development and human rights into their struggle, an action that heralds a new assertiveness."

"Local resistance to the loss of access rights to land and resources has motivated new efforts by international conservation NGOs to redistribute tourism benefits and promote social welfare in communities adjoining protected areas. Continued pressure from "below" will necessitate further attention to questions of land rights and justice. Increasingly in contemporary cases, local groups, often through the formation of indigenous NGOs, are demanding autonomous control of land and resources, which they view as customary property rights that have been usurped by the state. In this context, 'it is often sociopolitical claims, not land pressure per se, which motivate encroachments' into protected areas (Fairhead and Leach 1994:507). Local demands can be politically radical, and most international conservation NGOs and state authorities are reluctant to go so far as to grant sole control of forests and wildlife habitat to villages or other local political entities. Local participation and local benefit-sharing, however, are not the same as local power to control use and access. Yet, in the end, this is what many communities seek."

"So far, pastoralists are the main social group organizing to redress the perceived injustices of wildlife conservation in Tanzania. Other affected groups, such as peasant farmers on other park boundaries, have not yet organized around similar issues. The potential exists, however, for a much more widespread and comprehensive political struggle over land and resource rights in protected areas, such as developed as part of the nationalist movement in the colonial period. Provided with new democratic openings, pastoralists are moving away from 'everyday forms of resistance' and protest toward more organized and formalized forms of political action. It is difficult to predict what new structures and policies for wildlife conservation will emerge as a result of their activism. Land rights activists have, however, made it clear that wildlife conservation issues cannot be addressed without considering broader struggles for human rights and social justice." August 2001.

The death of the Rufiji Delta Prawn Project

The plans to build the world's largest shrimp aquaculture facility in the Rufiji Delta of Tanzania have encountered strong opposition from local people.

The Rufiji Delta, located about 150 km South of Dar es Salaam, contains the largest continuous block of mangrove forest in East Africa, comprising some 53,000 hectares. The Delta supports the most important fishery in Tanzania's coastline, accounting for about 80% of all wild-shrimp catches in the country. The Delta is home to approximately 41,000 people, many of whom are small farmers and traditional fishers. It provides important habitat for endangered animals and plants. The Rufiji communities that rely on fish, mangrove poles and rice farming have made an ancestral sustainable use of this area.

In 1997, the government approved a proposal by the African Fishing Company (AFC) to establish almost 20,000 hectares of shrimp farms there. The AFC wanted to use "public" land in the Delta to create shrimp ponds, hatchery, a processing plant, and a feed mill. Thirty-five percent of these facilities would be located within a "mangrove forest reserve", and the hatchery would be located on Bwejuu Island, which is part of the Mafia Island Marine Park. The driving force behind the proposed project was the harvest of 6,210 kilograms of prawns per hectare per year which would be expected from the farm, with most exports going to Europe and Japan. The business would allegedly produce US\$500 million a year in export profits, but social and environmental experts said the damage to the environment would far outweigh the profit.

The National Environmental Management Council (NEMC) - the environmental advisory body of the Tanzanian government - urged the government to reject the project on the grounds that it would have considerable negative impact on forestry, fisheries and marine environment, land use, water resources, as well as agriculture and wildlife. It would destroy 1,200 hectares of mangroves, including rare species such as *Rhizophora* and threaten habitats of a variety of endangered species. The proposed aquaculture operations would generate substantial pollution which would cause increased eutrophication, toxicity, and acidification of surrounding water resources. From experiences in other parts of the world, on average, semi-intensive prawn farms fail after about ten years. In spite of their sustainable use of natural resources and adequate management of the environment, local communities are usually left out when resource management plans are being made.

In spite of NEMC's recommendation and over the objections of Tanzanian and international NGOs and agencies, the Tanzanian Cabinet approved

the project. John R. Nolan, the majority shareholder of AFC, had also wanted to set up (in the Rufiji Delta) a fish mill and a fish processing factory all aimed at the Japanese, European and North American markets.

The project was strongly opposed by Tanzanian environmentalists, most notably the Journalist Environmental Association of Tanzania (JET), international environmental organisations, and local residents. They argue that this aquaculture project will deny them access - through plans that are underway to fence off the prawn project area - to the natural resources including prawns, fish and other marine resources with which local communities have coexisted from time immemorial. They further state that the decision to allow the project to go ahead was taken without taking into account the environmental hazards the project will cause to the area. Furthermore the decision to undertake this "development" project was taken without their consent and involvement.

From July 1997 to date, JET members have led the discussion on the negative impacts of shrimp aquaculture. Recently, 2,000 Rufiji Delta villagers filed an application with the Tanzanian High Court for permission to sue the Government to challenge the approval of the AFC project, and there is also another case pending in Court, filed by over 2,000 former employees of the company.

A proposal to establish the same by Coastal Aquaculture at the Tana delta in Kenya - an area with ecological features similar to those of Rufiji Delta - is still unresolved since mid 1992. The company purchased 10,000 hectares of land for this purpose. Later the land allocation was nullified by the Kenyan government through a presidential directive declaring the Tana Delta a wetland of international importance. However the Coastal Aquaculture company challenged this decision in court after which the high court ruled in their favour in 1996, meaning that the company may proceed to develop the 10,000 hectares for prawn farming.

In April 1999, Tanzanian NGOs were able to secure an interim order staying plans of the African Fishing Company's 10,000 hectare shrimp farm project at Rufiji Delta. Would the project have been implemented, one third of the whole Rufiji Delta would have ended up in the hands of the company for a period of no less than ten years, thus threatening the livelihoods of thousands of local farmers and fisherfolk living in the delta, and causing severe environmental impacts that would have put at risk the future of the region.

The panel of three judges chosen to hear and dictate on the case disintegrated when one of its members retired and another one was transferred. The case has not yet been assigned to another panel and it appears that at present there are not enough judges to constitute a new one. In the meantime, the company is said to be facing severe financial constraints which would have even forced it to sell part of its assets. Although the situation is not yet clear, it seems that the efforts carried out by concerned citizens and organizations have managed to save - at least for the time being - the mangroves and local peoples' livelihoods.

Finally, it seems that all those years of resistance to a damaging project have borne fruit. On August 15, 2001, it was announced in the press that the fishing vessels of AFC were to be sold through a tender team supervised by the High Court of Tanzania, apparently to offset part of the company's huge debt, accumulated over the years by the Rufiji Delta Prawn Project as a result of the opposition of local people to its implementation. The liquidation of the company implies that the project has been halted, thus ensuring the survival of Tanzanian mangroves and preservation of their social, economic and environmental services. October 2001.

Biodiversity loss linked to IMF-promoted commercial agriculture and mining

A country with profuse forests (open hardwood woodlands being the dominant type though there are also closed forests and mangroves), Tanzania has 33.5 million hectares of forest cover richly endowed with biodiversity, which account for one-third of the total land area.

However, this biodiversity is being threatened by several direct and underlying processes which have implied the clearing of forest land at a rate of 400,000 hectares per year during the past two decades. One of those damaging processes relates to forest conversion to commercial agriculture and mining, which in turn have to do with export-oriented policies widely applied at the national and global levels.

During the last years, the government of Tanzania has given high priority to the development of agricultural production aimed at export markets. Caught in the ups and downs of market prices established by powerful economic groups, the falling price of Tanzania's main exports, plus the growing cost of imported products, led the country to suffer the trite fate of

other Southern countries. In 1986, Tanzania signed a structural adjustment agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and continued signing IMF loan agreements for the following 15 years, thus increasing its burdensome debt. In the late 1990's, annual debt servicing averaged US\$ 438 million - amounting to 37% of total export revenues.

The IMF loans associated Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) requires the implementation of a number of policies such as support to large-scale export-oriented agriculture - e.g. the elimination of a tax on agricultural exports - and mining for gemstones and other precious minerals by domestic and foreign companies.

Between 1980 and 1993, 25% of the nation's forests were lost. Logging, deforestation and mining have been some of the major causes, but almost half of forest loss was due to cultivation of export crops. In the district of Simanjiro, for instance, over 50,000 hectares of land were cleared to give way to the production of beans. Eighty large-scale commercial farms, ranging from 90 to 13,000 hectares, produce those crops, mainly exported to The Netherlands, and have resulted in the displacement of the local Maasai inhabitants.

Meanwhile, agriculture for domestic consumption remains low and the predominant productive model has implied the displacement of thousands of local inhabitants, land-tenure problems, more poverty. Also, as mining companies have acquired large concessions, local pastoralists and farmers have lost access to land and water rights, and forests have been plundered to supply fuel related to the mines. In this way, forests are lost as both resources for local peoples' livelihoods and as habitat for wildlife.

Almost 10 years have passed since the Convention on Biological Diversity was launched. In these 10 years, SAPs have continued imposing their policies in Tanzania, reinforcing the world labour division: commodities produced by impoverished and biodiversity-rich Southern countries to feed money-rich consumerist Northern markets. Everybody knows - at least at the decision-making level - which are the causes of biodiversity loss. The IMF and the World Bank know. The Tanzanian government knows. Transnational corporations know. The governments of consumer countries know. However, destructive trends have not only not diminished but, on the contrary, have increased.

This scenario clearly shows that Southern countries like Tanzania, which rank on the weakest side of the "international order", are pushed to follow policies imposed by multilateral institutions and their leading Northern

countries. Those policies are inherently unsustainable since they imply at all levels the destruction or degradation of the countries' biodiversity. Political will within Southern country governments to conserve biodiversity is thus a necessary yet insufficient prerequisite for biodiversity conservation, because many of the underlying causes lie outside the country's borders. That is precisely one of the main issues that need to be addressed by the Convention on Biological Diversity. Will delegates have the necessary political courage to address it at the upcoming April meeting in The Hague? March 2002.

Traditional knowledge in forest restoration

Forest restoration has become a necessity in many parts of the world, particularly where local communities are suffering from the social and environmental impacts resulting from deforestation. The success of this activity depends on the involvement of the communities themselves, based on their traditional knowledge regarding resource use and conservation. The following example serves to illustrate this.

The Shinyanga region lies in central Tanzania, south of Lake Victoria, and is occupied mainly by the agropastoral Sukuma people. They have provided a key tool for forest restoration, with their indigenous natural resource management system called "ngitili", which involves conservation of fallow and range lands by encouraging vegetation regeneration, particularly for browse and fodder. The Sukuma have had to deal with erratic and poorly distributed rainfall with high variability between seasons, so they have developed a response to acute fodder shortages caused by long and frequent droughts.

The Shinyanga region used to be extensively forested with dense woodland and bushland species, and good cover of understorey grasses. But, massive clearing of forests to eradicate tsetse flies between 1940 and 1965, and impacts of intensive cropping leading to clearing of land for agricultural expansion, rapidly declining land productivity, and shortages of herding labour, have prompted the establishment of communal ngitilis - with an average size of 50 hectares - which together with individual ngitilis now cover over 70,000 hectares of restored woodland.

The traditional ngitili system of the Sukuma people provided a good entry point for forest restoration through local community efforts. Objectives of ngitili have been expanded to cover other wood products and services

required by the community while retaining the original objective of providing fodder for the dry season. Currently, traditional and scientific experiences are shared in management of ngitilis to facilitate restoration of forests and improvement of community livelihood.

Ngitili areas have led to soil conservation and reduced soil erosion, consequently contributing to improvement of agriculture and livestock production. Important naturally regenerating indigenous trees are being left and managed on farm and grazing land. To ensure that the ngitili were guarded and respected, traditional law known as mchenya was applied, supervised by the village security committee.

This example proves that forest restoration is not a technical issue but one of community involvement and adaptation of traditional knowledge systems. The revitalisation of ngitili has thus contributed to improved livelihood security through the restoration of woodlands which now provide a wider range of goods and services for the local people. April 2002.

Community-based forest management as a way forward for conservation

Biodiversity rich and varied African ecosystems, including tropical rainforests in central and western regions, were disrupted when the European powers landed and encroached on those territories. This disruption extended to customary social structures which were subordinated to a central decision-making organisation to handle regulation and management of natural resources exploitation.

Later, independent processes in many African countries failed to change this imposed centralised model. However, Tanzania is an exception. In the 1970s, during post-independence, the government began to devolve power and control over natural resources back to local authorities for community based development. Through a process of "villagization", the management authority was vested in elected local governments of village lands. The 1975 Villages and Ujamaa Villages Act, further supported by the 1982 Local Government Act, regulated the village system for community-based natural resource management encouraging common property a legal form of ownership.

According to 1998 data, out of a population of 30 million people, 25 million live within one of the 9,000 registered villages. Each village has a legal and institutional base, a defined perimeter boundary, and an elected village council - which acts as Trustee or "Land Manager" of communal village lands, and is the controlling authority over management decisions on water sources, grazing land and forests.

Village Forest Reserves cover more than 19 million hectares. A number of Public Land Forests and National Forest Reserves are being transferred to communities for management. The 1998 National Forest Policy promotes Village Forest Reserves and inter-jurisdictional collaborative management regimes between local communities; the 2000 draft forest bill goes even further providing delegation of authority "to the lowest possible level of local management", further empowering the community.

The new law sets out three types of community-based forest management:

- Village Land Forest Reserves: forest land ownership is vested in the entire village community;
- Community Forest Reserves: forests owned and managed by a sub-group of the village community; and
- Village Forest Management Areas: areas of government reserves placed under community management, not ownership.

Within this pattern, the village is the "manager" of the forest, while the central government provides technical advice, liaison between central and local governments, and mediation in dispute among village forest managers, acting as a watchdog on progress.

The restoration of the deteriorated Duru-Haitemba national Forest Reserve under the community forest management approach demonstrates the success of the Tanzanian model: the state Forest Department agreed to work with the eight neighbouring communities which began to manage the forest themselves, upon discreet management areas governed by local by-laws. The communities have successfully monitored and enforced these rules with visible improvement in the forest.

The Tanzanian experience shows a promising way ahead for a conservation pattern which takes into account power relationships and control over land - it tries to decentralise management, regulation and

control - while increasing citizen participation at the community level. May 2002.

TOGO

Community rights and forest conservation

Located at the Northern limit of the African tropical forest region, Togo still has 1,396,200 hectares of forest cover, which represents 24% of the country's total area. In a landscape dominated by the savanna, forests constitute a very important biodiversity site as well as a fundamental source of livelihoods for local communities. Nevertheless, forest management in Togo has been facing important problems.

Amis de la Terre-Togo (Friends of the Earth-Togo) considers that, even though promising conservation initiatives do exist, the management of the so-called "classified forests" (forêts classés) and that of protected areas has not been successful.

Twenty-four classified forests occupying 434,382 hectares are spread in the country. However, already in 1994 it was reported that about 20% of those forests were occupied by 47,500 displaced people. Local population has got a negative view of classified forests, as they are seen as an unfair interference of the State in their territories. This is basically true, even though the State's vision has been having a positive evolution to this regard - if compared with the situation in colonial times - and nowadays local communities can exert at least partially their rights to use natural resources in those areas. According to their culture, local people practice a sustainable use of forest resources. On the contrary, the commercial exploitation of fine woods - such as acajou, sipo, aybé, fraké, okoumé, ozigo and sapel - has been identified as one of the main causes of forest degradation in Togo.

The situation of national parks and fauna reserves is not better. Two national parks (Fazao Malfakassa and Kéran) and nine fauna reserves (Togodo-Sud, Togodo-Nord, Ahaba, Kpessi, Aboulaye; Aledjo-Kadara, Galangashie, Fosse aux Lions, Oli-Mandouré) have been created in Togo since 1970, occupying 697,185 hectares. The case of Kéran National Park is paradigmatic. Its creation in 1971 provoked the forced resettlement of about 60,000 people, who did not receive any compensation and were installed in an area completely lacking infrastructure and services. Whenever the State has tried to increase the

area of natural fauna reserves conflict has arisen with local communities, who see their livelihoods menaced. It is clear that they see protected areas as the direct cause of the reduction of their agricultural areas and hunting sites. In 1990 the situation became critical and massive attacks against protected areas took place. After the democratization process started in 1991 the occupation of protected areas increased.

How to combine local community rights and forest conservation? Friends of the Earth-Togo considers that the National Forest Plan approved in 1994 constitutes a positive step to this regard. The plan envisages the realization of an inventory of forest genetic resources to be used in management projects with the participation of local people; the sensibilization of local dwellers in relation to the negative impacts produced by fires, itinerant agriculture and the excessive cut of the forest to obtain firewood; the revision of protected area boundaries so that alternative activities can be developed, and the promotion of agroforestry. Friends of the Earth-Togo is initiating a project based on agroforestry, involving local people, to ensure the sustainable use of forests. Another project related to forest conservation has also been started to evaluate the characteristics and present situation of community forests, and to address the causes of community forest destruction in Togo. July 2000.

UGANDA

Carbon sinks and Norwegian "CO2lonialism"

Forestry companies worldwide are enthusiastically trying to implement the idea of establishing tree plantations in Southern countries under the Clean Development Mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol, signed in 1997, allegedly as a way of sequestering CO₂ from the atmosphere to mitigate the effects of global warming ... and of making good profits at the same time. Even if presented as "environmentally friendly", the whole idea of plantations as carbon sinks is based on weak scientific arguments and does not constitute an effective way of reducing CO₂ concentrations in the air. Additionally, it enhances the detrimental effects of the hegemonic tree monoculture scheme at the local and regional levels.

Norway has also got on the bandwagon and has set its sights on Uganda. The Norwegian company Tree Farms established itself there in 1996, and has one afforestation project in progress. Additionally, the Norwegian Afforestation Group got the authorities' agreement on a project in

November 1999. The former - which operates in the Bukaleba Reserve area under its subsidiary's name Busoga Forestry Company Ltd.- has already started a project to set up between 80,000 and 100,000 hectares of plantations of pines (*P. caribaea*, *P. oocarpa* and *P. tecunumani*) and eucalyptus (*E. grandis*). Such scheme is very similar to that adopted by the Dutch foundation FACE in the Ecuadorian and so are its consequences.

A recent research in the field performed by the Norwegian NGO NorWatch shows that both projects - and particularly the one of Tree Farms - have some very questionable aspects: both Norwegian companies have leased their land from the authorities for a bargain price, since on the one hand Ugandan authorities have virtually no capacity to assess what value the companies plan to generate, particularly through carbon trading, and on the other hand, corruption is present at the decision making level.

The Tree Farms project has provoked the eviction of some 8,000 people from 13 villages - mainly farmers and fisherfolk - from their lands, that the company is now occupying, condemning them to poverty due to the loss of their livelihoods, and creating a source of social and environmental conflicts. Moreover, under the "taungya" system, local dwellers are allowed to grow maize, beans, and other vegetables between the rows of planted trees during the first few years, but, surprising as it may seem, they have to pay for this land use and, additionally, they are being exploited by the company since their weeding and managing of trees during these first years is not paid.

By leasing out areas for "carbon plantations" during periods of 50 years, the country is giving away the option of changing land use in the future. The so called carbon-storing plantations have to remain as such for the foreseeable future, depriving the country's authorities of the choice of using the areas for other purposes in the peoples' interest. Additionally, Uganda will not be allowed to use these carbon sinks for its own carbon accounts when the country itself faces commitments, because the credits will already have been sold to Northern countries and companies in the rich countries.

As is usually happening, the carbon account in the Tree Farms' project is uncertain, since there is no way of establishing the net amount of CO₂ that could be removed and stored by tree plantations during long periods. It is even possible that they become carbon sources instead of sinks. Additionally, plantations face risks posed by fires, political unrest, and

upheavals, which are factors that make it hard to guarantee that the activities will be allowed to continue without obstacles. Not to mention the impact of tree monocultures on soils, water and biodiversity, including the ability of the understorey and surrounding vegetation to remove and store CO₂.

It is unclear whether the Tree Farms project will survive, because of social conflicts and problems with profitability. A recent EU-financed study, covering among others the mentioned Tree Farms project, concluded that there would be a "loss-loss" situation both for forestry and the local people". NorWatch has got the view that the Tree Farms project is really a "loss-loss-loss" situation: forestry is ailing, local people are suffering, and Uganda is being "CO₂lonized".

In relation to the Climate Change Convention process, the Conference of the Parties will discuss - when it meets in The Hague next November - whether carbon trading based on tree plantations in Southern countries should be approved as an option to emissions reduction. In the meantime Norway, that in 1997 made the commitment that its greenhouse gas emissions for the period 2008-2012 would decrease, has actually increased them. Norwegian authorities predict that this growth will continue until 2010. For Norway, planting trees in a Southern country such as Uganda is cheaper than implementing technologies that would lead to a decrease in its own emissions. Local Ugandan poor and the global environment will pay for the costs. June 2000.

The same old story about dams

The story is not new. Dam megaprojects presented to Southern governments and local communities as a token of prosperity and progress, bring disaster with them. The promotion of foreign investments disregarding the protection of the environment and the peoples' claims is now menacing the survival of Bujagali Falls in Uganda. The government is promoting the construction of a huge dam which, if realized, will destroy the scenic virgin beauty of the Bujagali falls, and the living space of thousands of people.

A report issued last February by the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) after a delegation of the Association visited the area confirms these fears. If the dam is constructed at Bujagali the falls, as well as the nearby islands will be submerged, and people will be

deprived of their farmland where many of them obtain their livelihood. The crabs, the birds the plants and other species of trees which are peculiar to such a place will be lost for ever. With the degradation of the landscape, tourism related with rafting will also disappear.

The project will not bring any advantages from a socioeconomic point of view either. "Why build another dam when there is already one nearby at Owen Falls and yet we don't have electricity! Is there any guarantee that we will get electricity from the new dam at an affordable price? We hear that even those people who are richer than we, are finding it difficult to pay for electricity. How sure are you that we poor people will be able to pay for the electricity once a new dam is built?" said one of the local dwellers interviewed by the NEPA delegation. And another one wondered: "The Company A.E.S (Nile Independent Power) promised us jobs, but are those jobs going to be there forever? Are the jobs going to benefit our children and grand children? Are those jobs empowering us to do better or to enslave us forever and ever and ever?" Local communities are also being menaced with displacement with a mere compensation to give place to the dam.

Concerned citizens in Uganda have been trying to bring pressure to bear on the leadership in Kampala to stop this cultural and environmental disaster. July 2000.

The Bujagali Dam: A useless giant

The Ugandan government - backed by the International Finance Corporation, the World Bank, the US agency Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), and a number of European export credit agencies (ECAs) - is promoting the construction of a huge dam which, if implemented, will destroy the living space of thousands of local dwellers together with the scenic beauty and historical sites at the Bujagali falls region on the Upper Nile River. Responsible for the construction of this US\$ 530 million hydroelectric dam is US-based AES corporation.

The main argument of the promoters of the project is that it will be useful to alleviate poverty and reduce the use of fuelwood and charcoal in a country with one of the lowest per capita income in the world, and where about 95% of the population does not have access to electricity. This argument clearly confuses causes and consequences. As Martin Musumba of "Save Bujagali" Campaign says, "the real issue in Uganda is

not electricity but poverty. Currently the majority of Ugandans have no money for electricity, for they are below the poverty line. Production of more electricity will not reduce use of fuelwood and charcoal until deliberate programs are evolved to reduce poverty and the cost of power."

The megaproject would completely alter the landscape, since it would flood the Nile all the way to the base of the Owens Falls Dam. As well as in the case of the Owens Falls Dam, located just 10 miles below the projected site of the Bujagali Dam, no independent environmental impact assessment (EIA) has been performed. According to Dr John Baliwa of the Fisheries Research Programme, the sources of the Nile, an extensive fishery resource with an estimated potential of 10,000 metric tons of fish per year, are menaced by the accumulation of water hyacinth behind the several dams existing in the region. Cumulative impacts including the desiccation of wetlands and the destruction of forests along the river are also feared.

From the socioeconomic point of view, consequences are equally negative. An EIA performed by AES itself considers that the dam would permanently displace 820 people, and affect an additional 6,000 by submerging communal lands and sacred burial sites. Replacement land for those who would lose homes or crops is not planned. In addition, the reservoir is expected to increase serious water-borne diseases like schistosomiasis and malaria, being the latter already the most important cause of death in Uganda. Sustainable tourism activities especially by foreign visitors who like to enjoy rafting in the spectacular series of cascading rapids of the Bujagali Falls will disappear, which will mean a significant decrease in the incomes of local communities. Jobs for local people promised by the company during the works have never turned into reality.

Ugandan and international concerned organizations are putting forward alternatives to this useless giant. They are promoting the use of true renewables like solar and wind, which constitute realistic and viable possibilities in order to stop the pressure on native forests for fuelwood and charcoal. "Future economic prosperity and sustainable water resource management in Uganda will not lie in huge dams. The way forward is the wise use of river-based environmental goods and services; not their extinction through the pursuit of hydropower lunacy," says the Kampala-based National Association of Professional Environmentalists, which carried out a study of the area in February 2000. January 2001.

Bujagali dam project questioned by World Bank's Inspection Panel

In July 2001, Ugandan civil society groups had filed a complaint with the World Bank's Inspection Panel, claiming that the Bujagali dam project violated several World Bank policies and that it would cause social, economic, and environmental harm to the local people. As a result, the Panel took up the case and on May 30 submitted a confidential report to the Executive Board, which concludes that the planned Bujagali dam violates five key World Bank policies. The Panel report suggests a series of corrective measures to rectify the project's problems.

According to the Inspection Panel - the World Bank's independent investigative body - the planned dam violates the Bank's policies on involuntary resettlement, environmental assessment, natural habitats, disclosure of information, and the economic evaluation of investment operations.

The Panel report finds the economic analysis for Bujagali to be seriously deficient. It reveals that a mild depreciation of Uganda's currency would drive power tariffs up to 20 cents per kilowatt hour, which the report calls "surely unaffordable". The report says that the fundamental project contract, the Power Purchase Agreement, is unfavorable to Uganda, and not always up to International Best Practice. It also reveals that the World Bank has neglected to assess potential alternatives, particularly geothermal energy, in the preparation of the project.

The report also finds that important measures to analyse or mitigate the social and environmental impacts of the Bujagali dam were either missing or seriously deficient. These measures include an assessment of the cumulative environmental impacts of dams in Uganda, a resettlement and a community development action plan for the affected people.

The Panel report suggests corrective action for rectifying the problems of Bujagali. The suggestions include various measures to properly assess the project's economic viability and risks, and changes to the unfavourable Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). The report says that a publication of the PPA would be "vital" for a public debate and understanding of the project's impacts.

It is obvious that the corrective measures suggested by the Inspection Panel, as well as an adequate analysis of its economic viability, must be completed before the project is approved by the World Bank's Executive

Board. The bank's managers have now six weeks to reply to the independent Inspection Panel's report.

The World Bank appears to have not yet learnt the lesson regarding the unsustainability of large scale hydroelectric dams. More importantly, it is not only ignoring the research findings and recommendations of the World Commission on Dams - made public on November 2000 - but is also violating its own internal policies and rules. Within this background, the question now is: will the Bank comply with the its own Panel's recommendations or will it ignore them and go ahead with this dam? June 2002.

ZAMBIA

The Minister's silence on the timber business

What follows is an extract of the editorial comment ("Zambia's forests") of the 30 June 1999 edition of *The Post* (Zambia) which sheds light on the real problems which Zambian forests are confronting:

"The deteriorating state of affairs in our forestry sector should be a matter of serious concern to all Zambians.

The concerns raised by environment and natural resources minister William Harrington about Zambia's ecological and environmental degradation resulting from cutting down of trees for firewood and charcoal deserve the government's urgent attention.

But minister Harrington's revelation that high electricity tariffs are affecting the Zambian government's policy of rural electrification raises more questions. Isn't it the Zambian government that put itself in this position through unbridled liberalisation economic policies?

With the recently announced new energy policy in which nearly all aspects of electricity generation will be privatised we should forget about rural electrification - probably not even in the next millennium.

But it is not only the clearing of trees for commercial agricultural activities, firewood and late fires that should be a matter of concern. Minister Harrington did not mention at all - the uncontrolled or poorly controlled - commercial exploitation of timber, especially in Zambia's Western, Eastern and Southern provinces.

Minister Harrington should know very well how forests are being destroyed in Western Province for Mukwa because he hails from there, but he has chosen to remain silent on this score. Why?

We don't think his silence is a product of oversight or has anything to do with ignorance. Harrington, in our view, has been President Frederick Chiluba's best, or most committed, Minister of Environment.

Timber is big business with gigantic benefits to those commercially involved in it and this is probably why minister Harrington is silent about it - attacking the small men and women dealing in firewood and charcoal.

We are not against well planned and managed exploitation of Zambia's forest potential to the benefit of our country and its people. But we are opposed to what, for example, is happening to Mukwa in Western Province.

The trees are being indiscriminately cut, without any system for replacing them. It takes 50 to 70 years for a Mukwa tree to mature and Western Province is a semi-desert region - posing a very serious ecological and environmental danger. And, moreover, what are the people of Western Province benefitting from this Mukwa business? Very little, if any. All the money realised from Mukwa sales goes abroad or ends in Lusaka. There are no timber industries, worth talking about, established in Western Province to benefit the local people.

We urge minister Harrington to take a close look at the timber business and its effects on the environment and do something about it." June 1999.

Causes of deforestation linked to government policies

Deforestation is considered one of the priority environmental problems in Zambia and woodland conversion to agriculture and wood harvesting for charcoal production seem to be the main causes of forest loss. The simplistic conclusion is therefore that "poverty" or "the poor" are to be blamed for deforestation.

However, there are a number of underlying causes related to the government's economic liberalization policies that have not been adequately investigated, forces that influence forest conversion to agriculture and clearance for charcoal production. Additionally, some studies have linked the increase in deforestation to economic policies, such as currency devaluation and removal of agricultural subsidies, that

increased the area requirements for crops grown on newly cleared land, predicting more deforestation due to removal of fertiliser subsidies and a switch back to shifting cultivation.

It is important to underscore that during the first half of the 20th century, traditional crop production in Zambia was dominated by shifting cultivation - the "citemene" system - which symbolized the effective use of tropical soil by the African indigenous peoples. For many years, the farmers of Zambia logged trees, burned the branches, and used ash as a fertilizer for the soil. Due to the nature of the soil, this method worked well and land could be used for 5 years before being left to rest. However, this system was dismissed by colonial interests - without finding out why the farmers used it - as backwards and destructive, pushing farmers into settled agriculture.

With the "green revolution" and the increasing European and urban influence, cultivation became more permanent. Chemical fertilizers were promoted and hybrid maize was introduced in the 1970s, making farmers dependent on subsidised fertilizers. The overuse of fertilizers raised the carrying capacity of the land but resulted in soil erosion, acidification and loss of fertility. The removal of agricultural subsidies in the 1990s had consequences for rural livelihoods and people had to look for new sources of income to pay for the now more expensive agricultural inputs.

The privatization of electricity generation - imposed on many countries by the IMF and the World Bank - increased electricity prices and affected the electrification policy, pushing local people to the use of charcoal as energy. The introduction of charcoal as an urban cooking energy source in Lusaka city created a new incentive among rural communities in central Zambia to clear woodlands to supply charcoal to the urban market. Incomes from charcoal production were used to buy household requirements and in some cases these were invested in agricultural production after the removal of subsidies: a forest product had become a source of subsidy for agricultural production. Under traditional agricultural system trees were cut and burnt but with the commodification of charcoal, cut trees were converted to charcoal for sale and the land cultivated to produce both food and cash crops.

Finally, it is not only agriculture and charcoal production which are destroying the forest: uncontrolled or poorly controlled commercial exploitation of timber is a major cause of deforestation in Zambia's Western, Eastern and Southern provinces. Few of the profits reaped from this activity - supported by the government - benefit the local communities,

given that there are no timber industries worth talking about in those areas. All the money realised from timber sales goes abroad or ends in Lusaka.

In sum, government policies - and not "the poor" - are at the root of deforestation in Zambia. It was government policies that made people switch from sustainable shifting cultivation to unsustainable "green revolution" crop production. High electricity tariffs have pushed people to use charcoal instead of electricity. Government promotion of certain cash crops - such as sunflower, soybeans and cotton - have incentivated further forest destruction. The government thus needs to be made responsible, not only for the past and current destructive process but, more importantly, for taking the necessary steps to address the problem. September 2001.

Deforestation, timber industry and free trade

The major environmental problem reportedly faced by Zambia is deforestation. A case study carried out by the European Forest Institute in 2000 gives figures: the annual rate of deforestation ranges from 250,000 to 900,000 hectares representing 0.5 to 2.0 % of the country's forest area.

Apart from other social and environmental impacts, the consequences of this process are felt on water supplies, since forests regulate much of the catchment area of the Zambezi river and are essential during the annual seven month long dry season.

The problem has reached a point where even the government has acknowledged the risk that forests may be wiped out if it does not put in place measures to stop deforestation. The Minister of Tourism and Natural Resources, Levison Mumba, said recently that the timber industry was a profitable business, but that it did not contribute to the country's gross domestic product because of lack of transparency by the stakeholders involved. He also suspected of tax evasion by the sector as well as illegal logging in forest reserves.

The government has recognised that the timber industry creates jobs, but the export of raw logs from the country deliver no benefit to the nation. The country must move away from the idea of importing furniture from other countries when it has the ability to make high-class furniture, said the Minister, who also expressed the need to support local firms that turn

timber into finished goods and to look at the legislation regarding the export of unprocessed timber in order to protect the local market.

The Minister appears to be moving in the right direction in the sense of linking forest conservation and use with social benefits derived from the development of a local timber processing industry. What he may not be aware of is that these sensible ideas may prove difficult to implement within the free trade policies imposed by the industrialized world through the World Trade Organization, which may define them as "barriers to trade", thus declaring them illegal. July 2002.

ZIMBABWE

A different type of top-down approach

Decentralization policies regarding forest management is being considered in the last decade an alternative to the centralized model in use in most countries, which has proved to be unable to assure forest sustainability. Many countries have given municipal and provincial governments additional forest-related responsibilities, in the hope that authorities closer to the ground will understand their local conditions better, have greater capacity to monitor what goes on, and make decisions that reflect local needs.

Nevertheless, this cannot be considered something good in itself since, depending on every specific process, the outcome can be more "bottom-up" or "top-down" oriented, and decentralization may or may not serve to enhance democracy and sustainable use of forests. This will depend on how much the process leads to giving previously marginalized groups greater access to power or to reinforce the power of national elites at the local level.

In "Forging (Un)democratic Resource Governance Systems from the Relic of Zimbabwe's Colonial Past", Alois Mandondo, researcher at the University of Zimbabwe, examines the decentralization process in that country. During the British colonial period, the government made native chiefs responsible for enforcing certain environmental regulations. Nevertheless, those rules did not reflect local interests and the government used the system to further colonial objectives, often at the expense of the native population. As usual, local people lost out: native farmers were forced to cease commercial logging, reduce their cattle herds, and provide free workforce for soil conservation activities.

According to Mandondo, this type of approach is still being adopted at present. Since independence in 1980, local authorities have continued to serve the interests of the national leaders of the ruling party instead of attending those of their own communities. Although the Rural District Council Act of 1988 gave district governments the right to enact land use and conservation laws according to local circumstances, they usually prefer to adopt the law models prepared by the national government. Additionally, communities have had few opportunities to participate in creating new rules, democratically elect their representatives and generate revenues from natural resources. In sum, the decentralization scheme in force in Zimbabwe continues to be "top down"-oriented and does not benefit local communities. June 2000.

Demystifying the role of "the poor" in forest destruction

The image of the last tree in a dry region of Africa being cut down by a poor peasant - ultimate responsible for environment destruction - is widespread. Nevertheless, such image is more based on propaganda than on empirical evidence. On the one hand, reliable data on key environmental resources in this continent is scarce, and on the other hand quantitative studies - for example of West African forests and in Kenya - have shown that the assumption of systematic environmental degradation is wrong, and that smallholders actually improve their environmental resources through investments in natural capital.

Rural households in the South use environmental resources quite extensively. Their renewability and spontaneous occurrence, and the fact that they are often held under communal tenureship patterns make environmental resource use - among which products resulting from gathering and hunting in the forest - different from other economic activities. Since conventional economy analysis ignores them, little is known about their value in terms of rural household welfare.

In Zimbabwe rural households are located in the Communal Areas (CAs), which hold the poorest soils and conditions of only 650 mm of rainfall a year. The native population was forcibly resettled by the former colonial government and things did not change much with independence. Additionally, their cash income is very low, so that they can be considered poor by conventional economy.

A research study by William Cavendish ("Empirical Regularities in the Poverty-Environment Relationship of Rural Households: Evidence from Zimbabwe", February 2000) in a typical rural county of Zimbabwe - the Shindi ward - in the mid 1990s found that on average each family derived over 35% of their income from freely-provided forest products. Around three quarters of all income comes from a wide range of other natural products. It was demonstrated that the poorest households depend the most on forest products. Even so, in absolute terms the richer households consume more forest products. While men do most of the hunting and wood related activities, women sell wild vegetables and fruits, and collect firewood.

The results of the research admit interpretations from several points of view. Concerning forests, the study shows how important the so-called "minor forest products" or "non-wood forest products" are for local communities of low incomes in a harsh environment. The hegemonic vision of forestry focused exclusively on wood production does not take this into account. Additionally, the research shows that the idea that the poor are responsible for the degradation of the forests is not only false but also absurd, since forest destruction would mean the end of a "hidden" but substantial income, which can make the difference between life and death. September 2000.