

CENTRAL AFRICAN REGIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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#12 — Management Watchdogs A Key to Sustainable Forest Management

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Key Concepts

- Though the logging sector in Central Africa is a vital source of national revenue, one of the largest commercial employers, and a significant source of environmental degradation, no information is systematically gathered and made public on companies involved, areas exploited, timber volumes harvested, and revenues generated.
- Worldwide experiences show that civil society monitoring of corporate and government activities has been critical in ensuring that national environmental laws are effectively being implemented.
- The capacity of non- governmental organizations (NGOs) to implement monitoring programs in Central Africa is limited by insufficient staffing, inadequate training, and

lack of support infrastructure.

- Though good information does not necessarily mean that natural resources will be managed well in the interest of the majority, lack of information almost assures that it will not.

What Do We Know About Logging in Central Africa?

Very little! Transparent management of natural resources in Central Africa is hampered by inadequate data, limited access to existing data, and inadequate communication of public information. Accurate national timber trade figures (volumes produced, exported, and imported) do not exist. Information collected by the Food and Agricultural Administration, the International Tropical Timber Trade Organization, and others rarely match. In Gabon, local environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOs) had to piece information together to determine where logging is underway, as the government has never released concession maps. Finally, information found in the public domain is often outdated.

So what? Forests in Central Africa belong to the state and should be managed for public benefits, not for private interests. Without information, the efficiency and fairness of forest management and policies cannot be assessed. However, the limited data available already indicates a growing pressure on forest resources (Figures 1 and 2), and hence a need to hold all the actors involved accountable. Despite the money this industry generates for national and local economies, it is often accompanied by several potentially environmentally damaging secondary activities, such as agriculture and bushmeat hunting.

Involving All Levels of Society in Natural Resources Management

The state, as owner of forest resources, is ultimately responsible for their management, which should theoretically benefit the country as a whole. The private sector, through large-scale logging activities, has a significant impact on the future of these resources. So far, local (urban and rural) people have limited information on how and why particular natural resources policies were elaborated and whether regulations are being enforced. In general, the forestry sector in Central Africa is characterized by (1) a lack of informed decision making and (2) a lack of transparency in that process. These factors hamper efforts to promote stewardship of forest resources and prevent the private sector and the government from being held accountable for their actions.

Local involvement leads to more successful decision making. Urban and rural communities have a direct stake in how natural resources are used, as this affects their daily lives. They know the political, economic, and environmental costs at the local level, and are an insightful group to involve in the design of specific monitoring activities. Outside experts may know what information to look for and how to communicate it, but local people know best how to get it.

Why Should Information Be Public?

When information is not made public, it is impossible to determine if management decisions are in the common interest. People who are dependent on, or care about, the future of natural resources but who have traditionally been excluded from management and policy dialogues, face deeply rooted social, political, and economic barriers to requesting accountability from logging companies and the government. Independent (i.e., non-government and non-industry) reporting allows the elaboration of tools that can be used by anyone to assess what is happening to natural resources. Mapping out where development occurs and who is involved promotes transparency by indicating who is responsible for what; monitoring the implementation and enforcement of laws fosters accountability.

Opportunities in Central Africa

There is an increasing effort in Central Africa to improve the knowledge base and enhance the distribution of information. The French cooperation, CIRAD and CIFOR financed the FORAFRI project (1996-99), which aimed to synthesize and distribute results from forestry research in the Congo Basin. While these initiatives are vital to developing better logging techniques based on scientifically proven facts, they have not, to date, fostered increased transparency and accountability. They have yet to actively involve local civil society groups and the information is often kept within the scientific community, government institutions, and enlightened individuals from the private sector.

However, civil society involvement and transparency are increasingly prevalent on many political and economic agendas. Two eloquent examples are

- La Conférence des Ecosystèmes des Forêts Denses et Humides d'Afrique Centrale (CEFDHAC), a collaborative regional ministerial-level initiative to address environmental opportunities and concerns, and
- The Central African heads of state's pledge, through the Yaoundé declaration, to improve forest management and biodiversity conservation partially by increased participation of local communities and better information sharing.

The time is right to help local groups participate in processes their leaders have committed to create for them. Independent monitoring can improve forest management by providing credible

and timely information. If it remains objective and neutral, it can foster more discussion between governments, private sector, and civil society.

Successful NGO Contributions Around the World

In Cambodia, Global Witness, a British-based NGO, has successfully documented illegal logging activities through analysis of secondary sources and ground-truthing. As a result, the Cambodian government recently appointed Global Witness to serve as the official independent monitor of that country's forestry sector.

In British Columbia, Canada, a group of concerned citizens formed Forest Watch a Global Forest Watch partner to gather information on the implementation of forestry legislation in their communities. Audits of logging companies' compliance with the British Columbia forestry code fostered greater public and government scrutiny of companies' performance.

In Indonesia, NGO reporting and mapping of forest fires helped identify large landowners as a source of the problem. In turn, pressure was placed on the government to pass new legislation to foster more sustainable natural resources extraction.

World Resources Institute's Global Forest Watch

The World Resources Institute helped create networks of local nongovernmental organizations through its Global Forest Watch (GFW) project. The objective is to develop independent monitoring of development activities in the world's forests, with the belief that reports published by organizations that do not have commercial interests in the use of these resources are likely to be more objective. GFW helps local groups access, process, and distribute information that can be used to better understand development trends, and that provides a basis for sound management decisions by the administration. In Central Africa, GFW is active in Gabon and Cameroon. They have recently published *A First Look at Logging in Gabon* and *An Overview of Logging in Cameroon* and can be visited at www.globalforestwatch.org.

Limitations of the Central African Context

The difficulty in Central Africa lies in the fact that democracy is relatively new. NGOs are of limited experience, as they have only been able to develop since the early 1990s in most Central African countries. Few individuals within these groups have the education necessary to

successfully manage an independent organization or the technical knowledge to be taken seriously by the government or the private sector. Qualified people are often recruited by the private sector, the government, or large international nongovernmental organizations that offer more financial security. Individuals willing to take a chance and grow within NGOs are difficult to find. As a result, NGOs, governments, and the private sector are unaccustomed to collaborating and, consequently, are often mistrustful of each other. In addition, development activities often involve large sums of money, and the concept of transparency is often viewed as threatening by entrenched interests.

The Power of Information: A Sign of Hope

However, creating access to information spurs further information flow. When the first drafts of the GFW reports were circulated, they were questioned. However, the data were fully documented and GFW partners were open and receptive to all comments. As a result, initial products have been generally well received to date, and participating local organizations have found that, as a result of the success of these publications, they have increased access to previously unavailable data. Our assumption is that circulation of maps and other information leads to more open discussions on forestry issues, and greater awareness of the need for data to be publicly available and as accurate as possible.

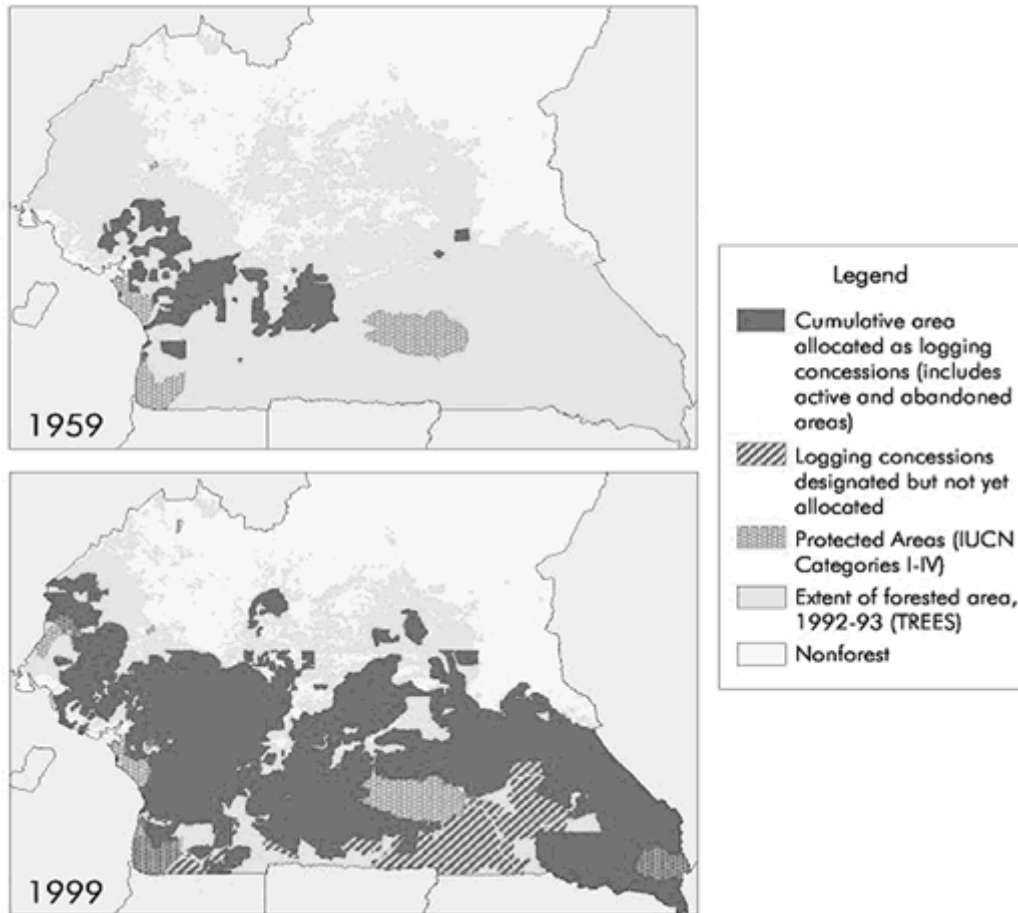


Figure 1: Evolution of Logging Concession between 1959 and 1999 in Cameroon. Sources: Global Forest Watch, An Overview of Logging in Cameroon (2000). Concessions data from WCMC, CETELCAF. Land cover from TREES (EC Joint Research Center), derived from 1992-93 AVHRR imagery; forested area includes dense moist forest and secondary/degraded forest classes. Protected areas information from WCMC, IUCN.



Figure 2: Congo Basin countries included: Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Sao Tome y Principe, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo. Source: <http://apps.fao.org/> (as of 8/24/00)

What Can You Do About It?

- Governments should increase transparency by developing legal frameworks allowing free information flow regarding decisions affecting national natural resources.
- Help nascent civil society organizations be heard and taken seriously by the private sector and governments. Design capacity-building exercises around specific desired outcomes and products. Invest in capacity building with a long-term vision and the understanding that not every trainee will be a success.
- While it is important to involve local partners in the implementation of projects funded and designed by the international community, nascent civil society organizations will greatly benefit from support to activities they have designed themselves in response to their local concerns.
- Individuals who are dedicated to specific issues but who are struggling to address them

given economic, political, or social realities, should be given the means to channel all their energy towards that goal through financial support and access to international resources.

- Donor-funded forestry projects should be contingent on the successful and constructive collaboration between national governments, private industry, and civil society. Donors should make the results of the projects they fund widely available to national and international audiences.

Table 1. Production and export volumes ('000 m³) of tropical timber for selected African countries, 1998 and 1999.

Country	Product	Production		Exports		
		1998	1999	1998	1999	% change
Cameroon	Logs	2895	2135	1604	900	-40
	Sawn	588	600	353	345	-2
	Veneer	59	53	41	30	-24
	Plywood	90	85	41	65	61
Central African Republic	Logs	530	600	117	135	15
	Sawn	91	119	72	108	50
	Veneer	0	0	0	0	-
	Plywood	1	2	0	0	-
Republic of Congo	Logs	1056	1191	710	862	21
	Sawn	78	120	47	92	95
	Veneer	55	60	46	52	13
	Plywood	2	2	2	2	0
Gabon	Logs	2100	2200	1679	1800	7

	Sawn	90	100	30	60	50
	Veneer	35	40	22	30	-24
	Plywood	54	60	11	20	61
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Totals	Logs	6581	6126	4110	3697	-10
	Sawn	847	939	502	605	20
	Veneer	149	153	109	112	3
	Plywood	147	149	54	87	61

Source: <http://www.itto.or.jp/newsletter/v10n2/7.html> as of 8/24/00

For More Information

Technical Reports

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CARPE...What Is It?

Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE)

Launched in 1995, the *Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE)* engages African NGOs, research and educational organizations, private-sector consultants, and government agencies in evaluating threats to forest integrity in the Congo Basin and in identifying opportunities to sustainably manage the region's vast forests for the benefit of Africans and the world. CARPE's members are helping to provide African decision makers with the information they will need to make well-informed choices about forest use in the future. BSP has assumed the role of "air traffic controller" for CARPE's African partners. Participating countries include Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and São Tomé e Príncipe.

Web site:

<http://carpe.umd.edu>

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