

Illegal logging 'ravaging DR Congo forests'

June 3 2013, by Pierre Briand



Women produce charcoal by cutting down woodland in Masisi near Kitchanga in North Kivu province last July. Multinational companies are profiting hand over fist from abusive forestry practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where illegal logging, mislabelled timber and false permits are widespread, according to several non-governmental organisations.

Multinational companies are profiting hand over fist from abusive forestry practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where illegal logging, mislabelled timber and false permits are widespread, according to several non-governmental organisations.

The forests of the Congo basin in central Africa cover about 100 million hectares (almost 250 million acres) and are regarded as the second-largest green lung on the planet after the Amazon rainforest, but in DR Congo trees are being cut down with little regard for the law. Local and international NGOs charge that Congolese authorities are working with logging companies.

In spite of tighter regulations recently adopted in Europe on imports of timber from Africa, it is almost impossible to verify the legality of tropical wood from DR Congo, according to the British-based non-profit organisation Resource Extraction Monitoring.

The group, which has staff in the field to investigate illegal activity, says the country's timber industry is tarnished by "widespread fraud and illegal logging".

Wenge (*milletia laurentii*), a heavy, dark and deeply patterned wood used for decoration and building, is both widely sought and listed as endangered—meaning it can fetch large sums of money, though little of that ends up in local hands.

"A cubic metre (35 cubic feet) of Wenge is worth five American dollars in the [forest](#) when it is legally bought from local communities. When it arrives in a port and is loaded on a boat, it costs \$450 (350 euros), and taxation is based on this rate. Yet in Europe, it sells for between 5,000 and 8,000 euros," an expert who asked not to be named told AFP.

"The loss of income for the Congolese state and population is enormous."



A gorilla picks foliage to eat on the slopes of Mount Mikeno in the Virunga National Park in 2008. In DR Congo trees are being cut down with little regard for the law, while local and international NGOs charge that Congolese authorities are working with logging companies.

Greenpeace Africa recently denounced the unloading at the Belgian port of Antwerp of a cargo of *Afromosia* (*pericopsis elata*), or African teak, which is another rare hardwood.

"Belgium has placed the interests of logging companies above the protection of the forests of the Congo and the people who depend on them for their existence," said Raoul Monsembula, the DR Congo national coordinator for Greenpeace Africa.

Forty cubic metres of *Afromosia* were closely followed from origin to destination by several environmental activists. These witnesses, who all asked to remain anonymous for fear of expulsion or losing their

contracts, saw the hardwood transported via the DR Congo river port of Kinkole.

"Upon visiting Kinkole port near Kinshasa, Greenpeace Africa witnessed log ends being removed and painted with new markings to hide illegal activities and to enable export," the NGO said in a March 4 report.



UN peacekeepers patrol near Sake, in the Masisi territory of Kivu-Nord province. In spite of tighter regulations recently adopted in Europe on imports of timber from Africa, it is almost impossible to verify the legality of tropical wood from DR Congo, according to the British-based non-profit organisation Resource Extraction Monitoring.

The wood was then placed on trucks to be transported to Matadi, the country's sole seaport, where it was loaded onto a cargo ship bound for Belgium.

In its report, Greenpeace named several suspect European companies and published photos of lorries carrying large, unregistered Wenge logs, along with wood that was completely unidentified despite regulations providing for each log from a single tree to be clearly marked with the same number.

The activist body also showed logs seized by police that would be recycled in the commercial sector.

While social and environmental restrictions have been imposed on industrial logging firms, the Congolese environment ministry has handed out far more artisanal permits than officially authorised to local groups that act as a front for foreign or national interests, the industry sector expert said.



A girl walks on a makeshift bridge near the town of Luvungi in September 2010.

The forests of the Congo basin in central Africa cover about 100 million hectares (almost 250 million acres) and are regarded as the second-largest green lung on the planet after the Amazon rainforest.

In the forest, wood is traded for packets of cigarettes, sacks of flour and hunting rifles, he told AFP.

The NGO Global Witness has denounced a lax application of regulations by Kinshasa, which it says makes such abuses possible.

"What do you expect when cooperatives or non-profit organisations can join up to obtain logging permits for 50,000 hectares—as is provided for in a planned decree on 'local community forests'—which they clearly could not exploit on their own?" the expert asked, warning that this scheme might open the door to further illegal activity.

© 2013 AFP

Citation: Illegal logging 'ravaging DR Congo forests' (2013, June 3) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-illegal-ravaging-dr-congo-forests.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.