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CAMEROON: Illegal logging fact file

Cameroon is one of the biggest exporters of timber in Africa. The south of the country is home to 20 million hectares of dense tropical forest supporting rich biodiversity and providing a livelihood for thousands of people from Cameroon's 200 ethnic groups. Illegal logging is having a devastating impact on forests and forest-dependent peoples.

Comments from one un-named Cameroonian:

The speaker cannot be named because of the threat of reprisals

"We were shocked to see how HFC [*a subsidiary of French logging company Bolloré*] plundered our forests. You could have called it outright sabotage... Numerous other undersized trees of various species were felled and others were simply dug in the ground so as to conceal this infringement to any possible forest guards of the Ministry of the Environment and Forests. What is worse, the forest fees to which we were entitled never arrived... Unfortunately, my numerous complaints remained unanswered. This is additional evidence of the disrespect the forest harvesting corporations hold for the village communities... I'm astonished to see that this kind of behavior still exists at a time when the fight against poverty and the community management of forest resources is of great concern to our government. How can one fight poverty while destroying the patrimony of the poor, thus depriving them of their livelihood?"

Timber trade

- The World Resource Institute reports that illegal logging in Cameroon accounts for 50% of all timber harvesting.
- A few large companies – mostly from France, Belgium and Italy – dominate Cameroon's logging industry.
- Cameroon is one of the world's top five tropical log exporting countries. The country's log exports are worth an estimated \$230m per year. Europe is the second biggest market for Cameroonian wood products.
- Over 18 million hectares – almost half – of Cameroon's historic forest has been cleared. Of Cameroon's remaining forest, 76% is under production or allocated to concessions.

Forest-dependent peoples and poverty

- Cameroon is home to one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world. It is estimated that more than 250 different ethnic groups live in Cameroon, many of whom rely on Cameroon's tropical forests for their livelihood, medicine, and shelter.

- Cameroon includes several groups of forest hunter-gatherers, or "pygmies," who migrated to the area several thousand years ago.
- Non-timber forest products – including bark, tubers, leaves, flowers, seeds, fruits, resins, honey, fungi, and animal products – play an important role in the households of the urban poor and forest dwelling communities.
- Human rights abuses linked to illegal logging are well documented. These occur when land rights are denied, timber is stolen, protests are violently repressed, or civil and political rights are violated. Forest peoples are especially vulnerable as their rights are rarely recognised.

Biodiversity and carbon

- Cameroon's forests are among the most species rich in the Congo Basin. Cameroon has the highest number of plants per unit area in the region, with mammal and bird species counts surpassed only by Equatorial Guinea. Five forest areas in Cameroon stand out globally for their plant species richness and presence of endemic and restricted-range bird species.
- As a conservative estimate, Cameroon's forests store at least 1.3 and possibly as much as 6.6 gigatonnes of carbon, most of which is locked up in their vegetation
- The Cameroon National Biodiversity Action Plan identifies unsustainable harvesting of timber and non-timber forest products as one of the direct underlying causes of forest loss.

Sources:

Global Forest Watch, Cameroon Overview, www.globalforestwatch.org

Forests at the Edge: A review of EC aid spending, www.fern.org

Forests of Fear: The abuse of human rights in forest conflicts, www.fern.org