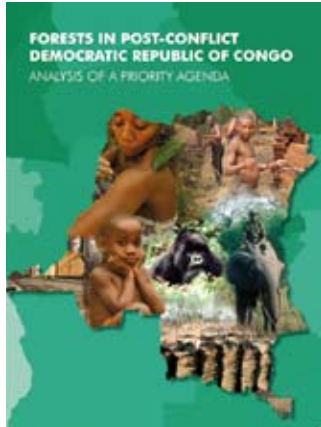


Brave new world?



CIFOR's expertise on the logging sector, on livelihoods, and on the nature and cause of violent conflict helped to shape the World Bank's engagement with the forestry sector.

Decades of mismanagement and frequent civil wars have had a disastrous impact on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Between 1960 and 2002, when the last war came to an end, the annual per capita Gross Domestic Product plunged from US\$380 to US\$96. Today, 90 per cent of the population is classified as poor. The paradox is that this is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of its natural resources, and especially minerals and timber.

Forests in Post-conflict Democratic Republic of Congo, a policy paper coordinated by the World Bank, CIFOR and the Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD), provides the most thorough account to date of the state of the country's forests. It describes their past and present use and suggests how the Congolese government could consolidate and improve the forestry reforms, inspired by the World Bank, which began in 2002 with the cancellation of logging concessions covering some 25 million hectares.

CIFOR's expertise on the logging sector, on livelihoods, and on the nature and cause of violent conflict helped to shape both the report and the World Bank's engagement with the forestry sector. The fact that the Bank is co-ordinating a good deal of the Western world's aid to a government with sovereign rights over the world's second largest tropical forest makes the report particularly relevant.

Initially, the Bank believed there would be a major influx of foreign investment in formal logging activities, and it predicted that this would bring significant benefits in terms of foreign exchange, taxes and employment. However, such a view, and the Bank's support for policies which would favour exploitation by foreign timber companies, proved highly controversial with many environmental groups.

CIRAD and CIFOR were able to help the Bank significantly revise its approach to DRC's forestry sector. CIRAD provided data that suggested that it would be nowhere near as easy to reach the levels of formal logging envisaged by the Bank, within the timescale it was talking about. "There simply wasn't the infrastructure required, and the political instability was likely to scare the most serious

investors away," recalls one of the co-authors of the report, David Kaimowitz, a former Director General of CIFOR.

Kaimowitz and his colleagues argued that the Bank should focus less on foreign investment and formal logging and more on the informal sector. Small-scale logging and the harvesting and sale of fuelwood, charcoal, non-timber forest products and bush meat have always been more important than formal logging activities, both socially and economically. In terms of policy, they argued, it therefore made sense for the government and donors to concentrate on providing support for small-scale logging and the marketing of NTFPs. This is now beginning to happen.

Kaimowitz believes that one of the key messages to come out of the study – relevant to countries beyond DRC – is that the Congolese government urgently needs to address the issue of land tenure, and establish the capacity to defend



Millions of poor people in DRC earn cash from harvesting, transporting, processing and trading bushmeat, timber and other forest products. (Kim S. Gjerstad)



The report suggests that the government should concentrate on providing support for small-scale logging enterprises in DRC. Raw logs (Filip Verbene), charcoal (Conrad Aveling) and sawn timber (Kim S. Gjerstad).

property rights. “There is much discussion about countries getting payments for environmental services – for example, by setting aside forests to sequester carbon – but we shouldn’t be rushing to make natural resources more valuable until there are clear property rights in place,” says Kaimowitz. If building roads to open up access to forests for logging, or establishing carbon schemes, increases the value of a resource in areas where ownership is disputed, this could easily lead to conflict.

This report was very much a collective work, involving over 40 individuals from a broad range of institutions, including donors, national and international research institutes and conservation groups. There were frequent interactions with government departments in DRC, and the views of environmental organisations that were critical of the World Bank’s approach were taken into account. The priority agenda proposed by the report is very much a consensus view.

Its main recommendations are that the government should continue with the reforms which began in 2002 and begin implementing the

new Forest Code. The moratorium on industrial logging should remain in place until the legal review of old logging titles has been completed. The industry must be properly regulated once it starts again. The report urges the government and donors to adopt policies which recognise the multiple benefits forests supply to local communities.

Similar recommendations – albeit different in nuance – were enshrined in the Brussels Declaration. This was the main outcome of a major international conference, held in February 2007 and attended by some 500 people, on the sustainable management of DRC’s forests. *Forests in Post-Conflict Democratic Republic of Congo* provided essential background analysis for the conference, at which CIFOR scientist Robert Nasi was the principal facilitator. “There was a great range of different interests there, including logging companies, conservationists, NGOs and donors,” he recalls, “but we ended up with a declaration where everyone was more or less on the same page. Now that we agree what needs to be done, it’s a question of working out exactly how to proceed.”

Examining the links between forests and conflict

Forty per cent of the world’s tropical forests are to be found in countries which are currently affected by violent conflicts. Recent wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia – to name but a few – have all occurred in and around tropical forests. Not that the relationship between conflicts and forest is a simple one, as a new study, *Extreme Conflict and Tropical Forests*, makes clear.

In some places, warring groups sell diamonds, timber and other materials harvested in tropical forests so that they have the wherewithal to purchase weaponry. Forests also provide a natural refuge for insurgents. And many forested regions suffer from high levels of poverty, which breeds resentment and sparks off conflict.

A joint collaboration between CIFOR and the Center for Integrated Area Studies (CIAS) in Japan, *Extreme Conflict and Tropical Forests* provides a thorough review of this complex issue. “What we’re saying,” explains co-author Wil de Jong, who moved from CIFOR to CIAS, “is that unless politicians pay more attention to the role of tropical forests in civil wars, these regions will continue to be breeding grounds for violent conflicts, banditry and the growing of illegal crops.” The book should also provide politicians and decision-makers with a better understanding of why civil wars start, and the sort of policies which are needed to prevent them.