

# ILLEGAL LOGGING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: A NESTING DOLL



Illegal logging is a major driver of forest degradation. It fosters vicious cycles of corruption and elite capture, harming the economies of tropical timber-producer countries, and depriving governments from much-needed revenues that should benefit all citizens.

However, Illegal logging is not a straightforward issue. Behind this simple narrative hide difficult questions, like a Russian nesting doll containing layers within layers.

In this infographic, CIFOR peels the layers of complexity surrounding this lucrative sector.

## THE INFORMATION GAP

Curbing illegal logging requires a clear picture of the sector. But accurate numbers on timber production and trade are rare in Africa. While many countries now collect some data, especially on timber exports, it is often incomplete, recorded in multiple units, and by different ministries. And even when information exists, it is often hard to access, or only contains one side of the story.



In 2016, Zambia declared exports of rosewood to China for about 3,000 m<sup>3</sup> at an approximate value of USD\$900,000. China, meanwhile, declared imports of about 61,000 m<sup>3</sup> for an approximate value of USD\$87 million.



In 2017, Cameroon declared about 280,000 m<sup>3</sup> of logs exported to Vietnam, while Vietnam declared about 510,000 m<sup>3</sup> of logs imported from Cameroon.

## INDUSTRIAL VS. ARTISANAL LOGGING

While international attention tends to focus on large-scale industrial logging aimed at the export market, most of what is considered 'illegal logging' in Africa is carried out by thousands of small-scale loggers looking to earn a living. The problem is that current laws are designed with industrial logging in mind, making it impossible for artisanal loggers to harvest timber legally.



Artisanal loggers in DRC produce an estimated 3.4 million m<sup>3</sup> of logs per year – 13 times more than the country's industrial timber sector.



In Côte d'Ivoire, non-industrial exploitation of forest resources is banned, nevertheless, artisanal loggers supply at least 27% of the domestic market.

## THE INVISIBLE MARKET

Because artisanal loggers do not exist in the law, their activities are simply not recorded, and they do not contribute to national statistics. In a way, they are invisible. Moreover, they mostly produce timber for domestic markets, which despite growing demand, are often overlooked in national forest policies.



If artisanal logging in Cameroon was accounted for in national statistics, the country's total timber production would be 4.3 million m<sup>3</sup> per year – nearly double the official figures cited by the government.



85 percent of DRC's artisanal logging sector supplies domestic markets.



Liberia's domestic timber market is 3 to 4 times larger than the current level of exports. Yet prices per m<sup>3</sup> sold on the domestic market are between 50% and 70% lower than those of industrial timber.

## PUBLIC PROCUREMENT FIRST

African governments and international donors account for a large part of domestic timber demand, and this share is expected to grow as countries implement more development projects. The problem is that government contracts do not require a legality clause. Therefore, changing public procurement rules could have an enormous impact towards the formalization of logging activities.



The Cameroonian government purchases at least 13,000 m<sup>3</sup> of timber a year, making it the top domestic buyer of timber and furniture in the country.

## ILLEGAL... OR MAYBE NOT?

Although artisanal loggers do not always respect the national regulations, they do not necessarily break the law either. The term 'illegal logging' infers that they are breaking laws that in some cases simply don't exist. Thus, the term 'informal logging' might be more accurate to describe this group.



The artisanal logging sector in the DRC directly employs 25,000 people.



Cameroon's domestic chainsaw milling sector creates 45,000 direct jobs and generates more than \$54.6 million USD a year.

## WHO BENEFITS?

Considering artisanal loggers as criminals is an excuse for thousands of public officials, including the police and armed forces, to collect millions in bribes. While most artisanal loggers would rather pay taxes than contributing to the personal profit of state agents, in most cases the formalization of their activities remains elusive due to conflicting interests.



Cameroonian government officials collect up to \$11 million USD per year in 'informal payments' throughout the value chain.



In the Republic of Congo, 'parafiscal' charges to decentralized state services make up close to 18% of the cost price of informal timber production in rural areas.



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