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New report finds adverse human rights impacts in tropical logging in Cameroon

Industrial logging and the clearing of tropical forests are associated with high risks of impacts on human rights, biodiversity and climate. Still, companies operating in the tropical forestry sector in the Congo Basin are not sufficiently mitigating or addressing these risks, a report by Swedwatch and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) finds.

Protecting the world's tropical forests and their inhabitants is critical to poverty reduction in forest-dependent communities and to the achievement of global climate stability. Still, tropical forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. While land conversion for agriculture has become the largest driver of deforestation, illegal and unsustainable logging also contributes massively to the ongoing destruction of forests and biodiversity.

“The fact that industrial logging is both driving climate change and is associated with adverse human rights impacts is well-known. This report indicates that the situation is not improving, which should raise alarm bells globally. Unless unsustainable logging practices are addressed, global efforts to reduce poverty and combat climate change are severely undermined”, says Kalle Bergbom, Head of Research at Swedwatch.

The report *Undercutting rights* presents the results of an investigation on human rights impacts from three logging operations in ten communities in Cameroon. The country is host to 10 percent of the Congo Basin forest – the second-largest tropical forest in the world after the Amazon – on which 75 million people depend for their livelihoods and cultures. Findings indicate that all ten communities included in the report were adversely affected by the operations, including those certified under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Impacts ranged from irreversible deforestation and displacement to negative effects on wildlife and small-scale agriculture. The report also found that vulnerable groups, particularly girls and indigenous peoples, were disproportionately affected.

“The report confirms that tropical logging entails human rights and environmental risks, and that benefits for local communities can often be disputable. To mitigate these risks, logging companies and buyers of tropical timber must conduct human rights and environmental due diligence in line with international norms”, says Karin Lexén, Secretary General at SSNC.

In order to ensure ‘no harm’ to communities and their forest livelihoods, the report calls for tropical logging companies to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence, where care should be taken to ensure broad-based community consultation. Furthermore, importers and buyers of tropical timber should use their leverage to ensure that suppliers conduct and transparently disclose environmental and human rights due diligence.

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The report was conducted in cooperation with Cameroonian organization Center for Environment and Development (CED).