



Forestry

Related Commodity Reports

- Wood Products

Summary of Key Documented Trafficking in Persons Risks

- ✓ Undesirable and Hazardous Work
- ✓ Vulnerable Workforce
- ✓ Associated Contextual Factors Contributing to Trafficking in Persons Vulnerability

Forestry Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa Overview

In general, the forestry sector refers to the growing and harvesting of timber.¹ Work in this sector includes cutting down trees with hand-held tools or felling machines, dragging logs with tractors, separating and classifying logs, and grading logs according to specific characteristics, and inspecting relevant equipment.² Forestry can also include “non-wood forest products” such as charcoal, honey, and the use of forest biomass for food and/or fuel.³ In Africa, while timber is largely produced for export markets, non-wood forest products play an important role in the daily life of many people.⁴

Africa has significant forest resources. In the Congo basin alone, roughly 200 million hectares are forested.⁵ Forest products contribute about six percent of Africa’s gross domestic product (GDP) and more than half of GDP for West and Central Africa. Revenue comes primarily from high-value forest products such as mahogany, found in the Congo basin where the forest is densest.

In general, wood product supply chains in sub-Saharan Africa are characterized by low value addition, with a low-overall level of processing that happens on the continent, although some national governments, like Cameroon, are making efforts to change this by controlling exports of unprocessed wood.⁶

Illegal logging operations, including the processing of the wood, are valued at USD 30-100 billion or ten to 30 percent of the global wood trade.⁷ Illegal logging and overharvesting in general is a significant issue, with over half of all forestry activities characterized as illegal in several African countries.⁸ Illegal logging is carried out using



the following methods: “falsification of logging permits, bribes to obtain logging permits (in some instances noted as USD 20-50,000 per permit), logging beyond concessions, hacking government websites to obtain transport permits for higher volumes of transport, laundering illegal timber by establishing roads, ranches, palm oil or forest plantations and mixing with legal timber during transport or in mills.”⁹

Illegal logging also decreases tax revenue base for governments and generates significant revenue for armed groups and organized crime.¹⁰

Trafficking in Persons Risk in the Forestry Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa

Undesirable and Hazardous Work

The tools and equipment used by loggers, for example chains saws, are extremely dangerous to operate. Loggers are in danger of falling or rolling logs as well. The hazards are exacerbated by poor weather conditions and the isolation of work sites.¹¹

Loggers employed on illegal logging sites are even more vulnerable to dangerous working conditions and abuse due to the lack of regulation and the presence of organized crime. In key producing countries in the Amazon basin, Central Africa, and Southeast Asia, it is estimated that between 50 and 90 percent of all forestry activity is carried out by organized crime,¹² which has increased incidents of murder and violence against indigenous peoples living in or near the forests.¹³

Vulnerable Workforce

Logging, legal and illegal, often occurs on the lands of indigenous people. For example, the Baka pygmy populations, who live in forested areas in Cameroon may be displaced by concessions as described below. They are at risk of becoming a captive labor force on plantations or surrounding infrastructure. They may also be vulnerable to trafficking into other sectors as they lose access to livelihoods.¹⁴

Associated Contextual Factors Contributing to Trafficking in Persons Vulnerability

In several African countries, profits from illegal logging have been used by armed groups to fund conflicts. Typically, the military or other armed groups secure control over a forest concession area and use the proceeds as a source of revenue.¹⁵



In a 2015 report by Global Witness, exported wood from Central African Republic was described as “conflict timber.” This report documented how Chinese, French, and Lebanese companies made financial deals with Seleka rebel leaders for “protection services,” thus financing the group to procure additional arms.¹⁶ Production of charcoal, a non-wood forestry product has also been closely linked with conflict; the Enough Project has documented how militias in the Great Lakes Region exploit corrupt police and government units to trade in illegal charcoal that has significantly contributed to deforestation of protected Congolese forest.¹⁷

In countries with active or recent conflict histories, identification and protection of land rights become more challenging, particularly when claims are made by multiple stakeholders.¹⁸ Given the overlap of forestry and conflict contexts in Africa, this is a compounding factor for displacement of indigenous peoples.

Illegal logging or semi-legal logging has been facilitated by corrupt management of forest concessions. According to Global Witness and the Guardian, permits intended for local forestry companies are instead granted to large foreign industrial operations. In addition to the ability to log in these otherwise restricted areas, these companies operate broadly without government oversight. These practices were noted specifically in Ghana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, and Cameroon.¹⁹ Global Witness’s reporting stated that “corruption is still the main threat to tropical rainforests, and is robbing communities and local people of their livelihoods.”²⁰ The role of government corruption in land grabs and displacement of local people is critical, as governments administer or otherwise control the vast majority of forested areas in Africa.²¹

Large-scale commercial forestry plantations can also have environmental impact. According to the Oakland Institute, a foreign company in Tanzania is clearing over 7,000 hectares of natural fauna for pine and eucalyptus monoculture.²² In Swaziland, commercial timber plantations use large amounts of water resources, which is particularly challenging in terms of Swaziland’s propensity for drought, and contributes to food insecurity for local people. Pollution from timber mills reportedly contributes to asthma and other illnesses for local populations.²³

Any logging activity – regardless of legal status – requires heavy infrastructure investment, particularly around road construction.²⁴ This increased infrastructure then opens access to forest previously inaccessible to any outside populations. A surge in logging operations, particularly in remote locations, may create an isolated population of workers vulnerable to trafficking.



Examples of Actions Related to Trafficking in Persons in the Forestry Sector

International Trade Legislation

Several of the world's largest economies have regulations banning imports of illegally harvested wood products, which decreases demand. In the United States, the Lacey Act bans trafficking of illegal wildlife and was expanded in 2008 to include illegal timber. Importing companies are required to declare the origin of all imported wood, and the act has been consistently enforced.²⁵ In Europe, the EU Timber Regulation and Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan prohibits selling illegally harvested timber and wood products in European markets. Companies are required to undertake a due diligence risk assessment. Australia's Illegal Logging Prohibition act also bans import of illegal timber.

There is some evidence that these programs are successful in decreasing illegal logging in Africa. Since 2008, imports to the U.S. from suppliers in the Congo Basin with licensed operations has increased from 76 to 94 percent. However, the Union of Concerned Scientists has noted that "the proportion of U.S. imports of Congo Basin lumber that are from verified suppliers has increased less rapidly than the proportion of total harvest area within the region that is verified. This suggests that U.S. buyers are on average less likely to buy verified wood than buyers from elsewhere."²⁶

Voluntary Certification

Forestry Stewardship Council

The Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) is a non-profit that sets standards and provides certification for forestry operations. In addition to its core focus on environmental sustainability, the FSC standards also contain criteria for indigenous people's rights, social and economic well-being of forestry workers and local communities and equitable distribution of forest benefits. As of 2016, FSC certified forests in East Africa, southern Africa and the Congo Basin and stated intentions to expand to West Africa as well.²⁷



Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)

PEFC is the most common certifier for smaller forestry operations. PEFC does not have a single international set of standards, instead allowing national branches to set standards that align with PEFC requirements. In terms of social protections, PEFC does require national standards to protect workers' rights and welfare, encourage local employment and respect the rights of indigenous people.²⁸ There are currently PEFC systems in African countries including Gabon, Cameroon, and the Republic of the Congo.²⁹

External Resources for Business Good Practice

- Forest Legality Alliance. *Risk Tool*. <http://www.forestlegality.org/risk-tool>
- World Resources Institute. *Congo Basin Forest Atlases*. <http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/congo-basin-forest-atlases>
- The Interlaken Group and the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI). *Respecting Land and Forest Rights: A Guide for Companies*. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/31bcdf8049facb229159b3e54d141794/InterlakenGroupGuide_web_final.pdf?MOD=AJPERES
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>
- USAID. *Forests and Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention*. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADE290.pdf
- Swedbank. *Swedbank Sector Guidelines: Forestry*. https://www.swedbank.com/idc/groups/public/@i/@sc/@all/@gs/@com/documents/presentation/cid_1437712.pdf





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Endnotes

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