
Democratic Republic of Congo: The World Bank acknowledges failure in EESRSP project

The vast rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo --the second largest on Earth after the Amazon-- have been seen by the World Bank as a target area.

In 2002, the Bank provided funding for the government of DRC to develop a new set of laws for the management of DRC's forests. In September 2003, the Board of the Bank also approved a pilot project to 'zone' Congo's forests into areas for industrial logging, conservation, and community use. The project entitled 'Emergency Economic and Social Reunification and Support Project' (EESRSP), included \$4 million to start the process of 'zoning' DRC's forests, potentially opening up tens of millions of hectares for industrial logging.

The Autochtones Pygmies Organizations from DRC, on their own behalf and on behalf of affected local communities living in the Democratic Republic of Congo, representatives of local communities of Kisangani in the Orientale Province, of Béni and Butembo in the Nord-Kivu Province, of Kinshasa/Mbandaka and Lokolama in the Equateur Province, of Inongo in the Bandundu Province, of Kindu in the Maniema Province, and of Bukavu in the Sud-Kivu Province, submitted a formal request to the World Bank Inspection Panel, an official independent watchdog, on the grounds that the World Bank plans threaten to harm the country's rainforests and destroy the livelihoods of people living there, and that the Bank staff failed to 'trigger' the Bank's operational policy on indigenous people (OD 4.20) when developing the project. As a result, the World Bank Inspection Panel, launched a preliminary investigation into the role of the World Bank in Congo's rainforests.

In March 2006, information released by the World Bank revealed that it had failed to ensure proper protection of the environment and local peoples in its programmes in DRC. Though the WB Management reaffirmed that "the Bank made every effort to apply its policies and procedures and to pursue concretely its mission statement in the context of the projects", it recognized "that, with respect to the EESRSP, the Bank was not in full compliance with processing provisions of OP 4.01, and OD 4.20, that should have been triggered during project preparation"(see full report at http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/files/Bank_management_response_to_complaint.pdf)

The revelations came following the preliminary findings of the World Bank Inspection Panel's report (see full report at <http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/files/EligibilityReportFinal.pdf>), according to which:

- * the Bank has acknowledged that it did not properly apply its own internal 'safeguard policies', which are designed to ensure that it does not harm the environment and local peoples;
- * the Bank claims it was not "aware of the existence of 'Pygmy' communities" in areas that would be affected by its projects, but that it would now develop a plan to ensure that 'Pygmy' people are not harmed by new developments funded by the Bank;
- * the Bank has acknowledged that it was 'inappropriate' to set targets for the number of new logging concessions that should be allocated by the Congolese government as a result of World Bank

projects.

Simon Counsell, Director of the Rainforest Foundation UK, said "The World Bank has finally acknowledged that its activities in the rainforests of the Congo have been flawed and must be improved. This is a major victory for the Pygmy people of the Congo, whose rights and livelihoods could be seriously harmed by inappropriate development of the country's rainforests."

Article based on information from: " World Bank admits to failures in protecting Congo's rainforests - official 'watchdog' to investigate", March 2006, The Rainforest Foundation,
<http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/s-News>