

---

## Mozambique: Forestry in Zambezia province, Chinese takeaway!

While accounts of illegal logging in southeast Asia's and central Africa's tropical forests, to supply the booming Chinese economy are increasingly common, this report is one of the first to document the "Chinese takeaway" from the semi-arid forests of Southern Africa. A four-months study of forestry in Zambezia province of Mozambique was conducted between November 2003 and October 2004. It found Chinese traders, local business people, and members of the Government and forest services are colluding to strip precious tropical hardwoods from these slow-growing forests at a rate that will exhaust the resource in 5-10 years. The timber is exported as unprocessed logs, undermining local industry, and transferring all its potential benefits from one of the poorest countries in the world, to what is becoming one of the richest.

The volumes involved in this trade are small compared with those from humid tropical producing countries, and this has led to the relative neglect of this issue internationally. However, while the volumes are small, the impact on the economy of this poor country is great, in terms of loss of employment, loss of revenues, abuse of community rights and degradation of a valuable resource and governance systems. Rather than calling for a ban on logging, this report calls for a ban on log export, to reduce cutting, promote sustainable management and industrial development, and perhaps most importantly, that would fulfil a government's promises to its people.

The Government of Mozambique, its donors and the International Financial Institutions have subscribed to many policies and programmes to support the country's main goal of poverty alleviation. The Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA), the National Agricultural Programme (PROAGRI, phases I and II), and the recent forestry policy, law and regulations all cite sustainable forest management and the development of forest industries for combating rural poverty. In 2003 the government signed the African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) initiative committing itself, internationally, to fight illegal logging, trade and corruption, and to promote sound forest governance.

This report demonstrates how the Government –and by association– the IFIs and donors who support it, have failed to deliver on these commitments. This is not because of a lack of technical capacity or resources, or simply a lack of political will, but because of a direct conflict of interest between the public responsibilities and private interests of government officials –notably the National and Provincial Services for Forestry and Wildlife (DN/SPFFB)- and others, including senior political party (FRELIMO) members. Together with local business interests and Asian traders these public servants constitute a "timber mafia". Rather than combating illegal logging, they are, by manipulating forest regulations and information, taking bribes and personal involvement in logging, facilitating and personally benefiting from this "Chinese takeaway". The report calls the government and donors to account –for the sake of the poor of Mozambique, and the donor's own domestic tax-payers– and to bring the forests under proper governance.

Three cornerstones of sound forest management, should be a system for limiting the annual cut to levels that can be sustained in the long-term, forest concessions with management plans, and industrial capacity, in balance with forest productivity. Following a major scandal in 2000, the forest

---

services were obliged to organise production around sustainable annual quotas. The last published inventory, sets the annual allowable cut of currently marketable species in Zambezia to 18,000 m<sup>3</sup>. However, for the last 5 years, SPFFB has authorised over 28,000 m<sup>3</sup> per year, and the quota for 2004 was nearly 50,000 m<sup>3</sup>. New inventory data is cited to justify the new quota, but has never been published.

Most of the quota is allocated, not to existing industries, providing jobs and development, but to small operators, linked to Asian exporters based in Quelimane port who provide credit essential for paying licence fees. The small operators are all Mozambican nationals, but there are so many of them (over 150 in 2003), their activities so uncontrolled, and their reinvestment in the sector so low, that they have become part of the problem of forestry rather than part of the solution. They believe that exploiting forests is their right, rather than a privilege awarded to those who manage the forests wisely.

A forest concession system is required by policy and law, but is being established only very slowly. Over 40 concession applicants, including Asian buyers, foreign investors, local industries and fronts for members of the forest services or government, have applied for over 50% (1.5 million hectares) of the forest. Very few have prepared the management plans or established industries, required by law, but all are given licences to harvest in their areas, meanwhile. The few management plans that have been approved actually propose to strip all the commercial timber in 5-10 years!

Rural communities fought a long battle to gain rights to their land, but have no rights to their timber, except for subsistence. With few alternative sources of employment, they are reduced to working for licensed operators for less than the minimum wage, or supplying other dealers with logs they harvest illegally. Communities are supposed to receive 20% of licence fees, but have never received it, and the total would anyway, be small. More radical reform is needed, if forests are to benefit the communities.

Quotas and licences do not indicate how much timber is really being harvested or from where. There is only one real checkpoint, under-reporting is widespread and systematic, inspection is lax, bribes are common, and the computer-based control system of licensing and transport, introduced by SPFFB after the scandal is largely cosmetic. In 2002, the quota was set at 42,000 m<sup>3</sup>, and SPFFB only licensed 33,200 m<sup>3</sup> and allowed export of 28,400 m<sup>3</sup>. But that year, 17 bulk carriers and 27 container ships loaded logs, and the port recorded export of 51,000 m<sup>3</sup>! None of the government departments reporting on forestry give the same figures. The situation must be investigated in detail.

The greatest problem -because it drives the whole system- is the continued export of logs. According to law, the main commercial species must be processed prior to export, and contrary to loggers' account, industrial capacity in Zambezia is sufficient to process the whole annual quota. However, just as the law was coming into force, the Ministry, under pressure from Asian buyers, passed an internal decree reclassifying the commercial timbers to permit their export as logs. This decree may be illegal, but until it is declared as such, the "Chinese takeaway" will continue.

In short, too many operators, large and small, are being allowed to take too many logs, from too many places in a way that is rendering the resource unmanageable in the longer term. The system abuses the rights of local communities, denying them opportunities for vitally needed employment and skills development that would come from sustainable forest management, processing industries and community based enterprise. The effectively illegal export of logs is starving local industry and threatening local jobs. The government forest services are presiding over and colluding with these abuses, in a way that makes a mockery of the notion of "governance" and of their donors'

---

objectives. There can be no excuse for the personal enrichment and public loss on the scale that is taking place.

The purpose of the study is not only to document these problems and raise awareness, but also to propose solutions. The main report provides technical details of practices in the forest sector, to explain and justify five key reforms proposed, and to refute arguments put forward by the “timber mafia” to allow the “Chinese takeaway” to continue.

The proposed reforms include an immediate moratorium on log exports, a review of the Ministerial decree permitting this export, the suspension of logging by small operators, the suspension of further concession approvals and independent review of existing forest management plans. The rights of local communities to their forest resources should be guaranteed by law. Support should be given to communities to manage their own forests, and operators wishing to exploit forests should be obliged to enter into legal partnerships with communities. A series of other measures are proposed for each of the main stakeholder groups. In the meantime, those harvesting operations linked to industries should continue, subject to independent monitoring, in order to preserve jobs and supply domestic timber needs. It is vital that forest operations, not linked to permanent quality jobs, are stopped, to create the time and incentives needed to bring the sector under control. As problems are successfully addressed, moratoria can be lifted, until all activities are once again permitted. Donor-funded infrastructure schemes are proposed as compensation measures to minimise the impacts on the provincial economy during the transition to sound governance.

Importantly, the report calls for international action to put pressure on the Government of China to take responsibility to ensure that its own economic boom does not rob poor, vulnerable countries of the resources they need for their own development.

By Catherine Mackenzie, E-mail: [camackenzie2002@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:camackenzie2002@yahoo.co.uk)