
Solomon Islands: Logging as the main factor of sexual abuse of girls

Logging in Southern countries has proved that it may collect big export revenues for governments and huge profits for companies, but for local communities it has several miserable sides spreading environmental and social distress everywhere (see WRM Bulletin N° 34).

One of such sides has been highlighted in Solomon Islands, where a recent report by the Church of Melanesia's Christian Care Centre, which undertook the study in the Arosi region of Makira province, revealed that more than 70 children from 12 villages had been sexually exploited by loggers working at nearby logging camps of the six villages studied.

The report "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Solomon Islands: A Report Focusing on the Presence of the Logging Industry in a Remote Region" looks into the commercial sexual exploitation of girls, or sexual abuse in exchange for money or goods, like rice, and focuses on the presence of the logging industry and the role this industry plays in abusing and exploiting children.

Though no company name is provided by the report, logging in Solomon Islands is dominated by Malaysian and to a lesser degree, South Korean companies. However, clear-felled timber is all now being shipped to China to be used in Olympic facilities in Beijing.

Looking into the contributing factors related to the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in the region, the overall findings from the group work and from discussions with the project team were that "child abuse has been a longstanding problem in the community, while CSEC represents a more recent development which was largely attributed to the presence of the logging industry".

Logging has implied a dramatic change in the traditional way of living of the local communities, with the introduction of cash, different customs, distorted consumption. Money, as an element of power, is being held by men, mainly foreigners. Women, especially young girls -some of them no more than 13 years old- become the prey of those men, they themselves also a prey of exploitation, alienation and loneliness. What follows is disharmony and social decay.

According to the report "The issue of money is highly significant to the presence of CSEC. Money was cited as the reason for CSEC in most cases." "It appeared that in most cases, money was used for what would be considered in the villages as non-necessities, such as processed foods, housing made from permanent materials (rather than the more common leaf houses), travel to visit Honiara [the capital city] for enjoyment and clothing or beauty products. The overseas loggers presented an 'opportunity' for young people to access money and goods which would normally be out of their means. This is also reflected in the number of reports of children visiting the camps to view movies, look at machinery or look at logging vessels- things they would not otherwise be able to see. As such, the children see logging camps as exciting places, and can be easily persuaded to board the ships or enter houses and bedrooms, thus greatly increasing the risk of abuse." "Outside influences were also mentioned in relation to loss of kastom [customary or traditional practices], where things such as the availability of alcohol and drugs, pornographic materials and influence from Honiara (with greater crime rates and a more "Western" style of living) were considered to be damaging to traditional ways

of life.”

Logging is a business which not only does not provide decent lives to the local communities but also reinforces and deepens gender abuse. Quoting the words of Ta’ahia who authored “Logging, a cursed blessing: is this the island way? The plight of the Tawatana Villagers of Makira Island”:

“Logging is killing our people. Maybe not right away, but slowly, and maybe in more ways than we will know. To stop unsustainable logging development in our islands is not only for the preservation of our environment or the islands but most importantly for the preservation or conservation of what it means to be Solomon Islanders, and above all, the integrity, freedom and survival of a race of people. Yes, we all must face change, and we are, but we should ask ourselves: Are we progressing, or benefiting from such development? Or are we no better off than before, except now maybe worse since we are losing our resources, our cultural morals, and being forced to change at the hands of shady business dealings and short-term benefit by a few chosen men?”

Article based on: “Logging sparks rise in child sex abuse-Solomon”, Solomon Star, 01 August 2007, <http://www.solomonstarnews.com/?q=node/14571>, sent by Nina Bulina, Greenpeace Australia Pacific, Email: nina.bulina@pg.greenpeace.org; “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Solomon Islands: A Report Focusing on the Presence of the Logging Industry in a Remote Region”, http://www.anglicanmelanesia.org/download/CCC_CSEC_Report.pdf