
Papua New Guinea: Malaysian companies logging out the forest

Official figures from the PNG Forest Authority show that between 1993 and 2001 a total of 20 million cubic meters of logs were exported from PNG. If all those logs were laid side by side they would stretch for over 1,000 kilometres. If they were laid end to end they would stretch for 7,000 kilometres.

In the last 10 years most of the logs have been taken from West New Britain but now those forests are almost gone. Now the logging companies in PNG --most of them Malaysian-- are getting most of their logs from Western and Gulf Provinces.

The clear-felling of large forest areas and the ensuing erosion and environmental damage have been decried by PNG Minister for Welfare and Social Development, Lady Carol Kidu. She said that under the guise of inevitable globalisation, logging companies from countries that have themselves imposed environmental restrictions on the industry, were pushing their way further into the forests exploiting the need of impoverished traditional landowners.

The Minister also raised the negative impact of logging on women. "Women have not been visible at the negotiating table and yet it is the women carrying the burden of the negative social and environmental effects.

Working conditions in the logging industry have been exposed by Western Province Governor Bob Danaya. After a visit to the logging operations of Concord Pacific and Rimbunam Hijau, he declared: "When you look around in the villages there are no tangible benefits that one can witness. And the workers on the barges are virtually working like slaves in very poor conditions".

Western Province has seen a lot of controversy in recent months with allegations of illegal logging by Concord Pacific and Rimbunam Hijau. The Ombudsman Commission has also recommended the dismissal of the National Board Chairperson Dr. Wari Iamo, following an investigation into his attempts to give the huge Kamula Dosa logging permit in Western Province to Rimbunam Hijau in 1999, avoiding public tendering.

As Lady Kidu has warned: "It is estimated that PNG will be completely logged out in the next decade if we do not take control of the industry in a sustainable way".

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