
Cambodia: The farce of World Bank and government consultation on forests

In late July NGOs wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture to request that Forest Concession Management Plans and Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs), submitted by concessionaires to the Department of Forestry and Wildlife, be released for public comment. Three and half months later, an edited version of these documents is to be released, to allow for just over two weeks of public comment. This, the World Bank has decided, is sufficient a period of time to justify the release of the final tranche of their Structural Adjustment Credit (SAC).

NGOs condemn the Department of Forestry for acting in bad faith by allowing an unreasonably short period for consultation on Forest Concession Management Plans. NGOs also condemn the World Bank for releasing the SAC when it had previously called a two week consultation period "grossly inadequate". As Mr William Magrath of the World Bank wrote in June 2002: "My view is that two month period for disclosure and comment would be desirable, one month would be tolerable. Two weeks is grossly inadequate."

In addition, in early September 2002 the Cambodian Department of Forestry and Wildlife's own foreign advisors (from FAO, GTZ, Danida and JICA) called for a minimum of six months for community consultation and public disclosure. They wrote: "Considering the vast expanse of the concessions and the numerous communities involved, it is necessary to give a longer time horizon, for community consultation and public disclosure. We recommend that in the long term it should be a minimum of 6 months..."

"Releasing 'edited' Management Plans and ESIs for just over two weeks of public comment indicates that the Department of Forestry and Wildlife views Cambodians living in forest areas with contempt. That the World Bank believes this time period is sufficient to justify the release of the final tranche of their Structural Adjustment Credit indicates that they view both local communities and other members of the donor community with as little respect as does the Department of Forestry" said Eva Galabru of Global Witness.

"A short period of disclosure, with the few opportunities it provides for public comment on Management Plans indicates that the Department of Forestry wants to allow logging companies to cut as soon as possible" said Andrew Cock of the NGO Forum.

"Experience all around the world shows that a logging company that operates without regard for local communities is a logging company that is not interested in sustainability. The Department of Forestry at the national level has proved itself incapable of managing Cambodia's forests for public benefit, but when will the World Bank accept that their support for the logging of forests where people live is making communities poorer? Is this the mandate of the World Bank?" stated Mike Bird of Oxfam GB.

Logging companies are now closer than ever to resuming logging in areas of great importance to the livelihoods of many rural Cambodians. However, many of the more remote villages located in or near concessions are unlikely to even see management plans within the allotted period for consultations.

Article based on information from: "Grossly inadequate consultation period shows contempt for Cambodia's poor", press release from The NGO Forum on Cambodia, Andrew Cock,