Papua New Guinea: The logging industry's empty promises of job generation

There should be more literature on the broken promises of the logging industry. When those companies arrive in a country, they try to entice the local people with arguments like that their operations will bring jobs and training for them.

In the case of Papua New Guinea, an investigation carried out in May 2001, by Joe Meava, information manager of the publication "Echoes from the Forest", into reports of illegal logging in Pondo, in the Open Bay area of East New Britain, reveals that most of the jobs created --much less than expected, anyway-- were performed by foreign workers, who are not legally allowed to occupy positions which could be filled many times over by Papua New Guinean workers.

According to the forest activist network PNG Forest Watch, "The data that has been released shows clearly that the logging companies must be involved in either a major illegal immigration scam or a criminal people smuggling operation."

During a visit to the logging site, Joe Meava saw that out of the five bulldozers that were clearing tracks through the forests, or were pulling logs out, four were being operated by Asians. Only one was driven by a national from East New Britain.

A youth from Pondo village told him that one of the jobs he performed as an employee of the company, was to keep "unnecessary" people out of the logging area. According to Meava, the youth meant people whose families or clans were not party to any logging agreement. The father of the young man was the head of a clan who had welcomed the logging company into their area. His part of the deal was that his son was employed as a security guard against his own people.

According to official company documents from 2001, 17 timber companies with a combined log export value of US$ 50 million or one third of the total log exports from PNG, employed some 468 staff, including 420 people or about 90 percent of the total with obviously Asian names, mostly from Malaysia and Indonesia but also mainland China and the Philippines, while a mere 40 of the total of 468, or 10 percent of the employees appeared to have possibly Papua New Guinea names. This major immigration traffic may become a source of conflict between foreign and national workers.

The investigator noted that the records of the 17 logging companies also list 27 forest surveyors but NO foresters, NO forest managers, NO environmental managers, NO conservation officers and NO biologists amongst their employees. It is also shocking to see that the 17 companies list no nurses, no health workers, and no medical orderlies, despite their claims of providing local health services to the rural communities. And moreover, the data provided exposes the grossly exaggerated total employment figures claimed by the logging industry --ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 jobs-- when compared with the 468 staff actually employed by the 17 logging companies.

Article based on information from: "Logging company employment data: another example of forest industry corruption", 24 June 2002, PNG Forest Watch, lukautimbus@global.net.pg ; Echoes from

the Forest 6: “Logging Employment and Jobs for Local People”, 3 June 2002, by Joe Meava, Information Manager, PNG Eco-Forestry Forum, http://forests.org/articles/reader.asp?linkid=12128