
Papua New Guinea: Diminishing forests, increasing suffering

Papua New Guinea, widely recognised as a country with a great diversity of forests, is now facing the depletion of its forest resources. An Independent Forestry Review identified that 7 million hectares of forests have been allocated for large-scale commercial logging.

The Islands region has provided high stocking densities and easy access to logging companies, which led to an increase in concessions that quadrupled between 1982 and 1991 and consequently a rapid depletion of the island resources. The companies shifted then to mainland, where they have been acquiring ever-larger concessions in order to remain profitable.

In the mid 1990's, log export levels reached a peak --about 3 million cubic metres per year--, to decline steadily thereafter. This decline has been a consequence of the exploitation of forest areas with lower stocking densities because the most valuable forests have already been exhausted.

These are just numbers and equations which record cutting cycles and profit rates deprived of the whole vital life involved in a forest. For companies, it's just a problem of (economically) unsustainable consumption of logs, perhaps, but for the people of Papua New Guinea, it means environmental destruction which implies that they have to search further and longer for food and medicines --with animal and bird populations dispersed, fruit and nut trees destroyed, medicinal plants and vines crushed-- and finding their water polluted by soil erosion and their traditional building materials bulldozed.

Forests suffer, nature suffers, and people suffer the social and cultural costs that come with the so called forestry "development", which only serves a handful of corporations to reap huge benefits. A bad ratio, indeed.

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