

Sir

I am writing in response to the ITTO diagnostic mission report *Achieving the ITTO Objective 2000 and sustainable forest management in Cambodia*, which was summarised in the previous edition of the *TFU* (15/1).

The ITTO Objective 2000 is to “strive for an international trade of tropical timber from sustainably managed forests.” Tying ITTO’s assessment to this objective has produced a report that has little grounding in reality. In the first instance, the report contains no reflection on whether or not export-oriented timber extraction is an appropriate model for Cambodia, nor whether sustainable forest management is advisable in the forest areas currently allocated to production. Instead it recommends that the Cambodian government allow further cutting by the same concessionaires who have been the driving force behind illegal logging since the mid 1990s.

Cambodia’s concessionaires comprise fly-by-night foreign ‘investors’ and mafia-style Cambodian operators with close links to certain senior officials. From the mid 1990s, these companies ripped through what the World Bank has termed Cambodia’s “most developmentally important natural resource”, leaving much of the forest severely degraded. Aside from illegal logging, the concessionaires’ activities encompassed large-scale royalty evasion and human rights’ abuses against local inhabitants.

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This has not deterred the ITTO diagnostic mission from concluding that what Cambodia and its forests need is more industrial logging by the same companies. The report justifies its conclusion with arguments about the presumed ease of regulating large concessions and the claim that they will benefit local people and contribute to development.

Neither of these optimistic contentions is supported by the history of concession logging in Cambodia; indeed, with respect to the link between logging and development the mission’s conclusion is an inversion of reality. Floods in 2000, which the UN linked to deforestation, are estimated to have cost Cambodia US\$156 million. By contrast, the entire forest sector generated only US\$92 million for the national treasury between 1994 and 2000.

A comparison of such figures does not take account of the damage the concessionaires have inflicted on rural livelihoods, notably those of the more than 100 000 people who depend on tapping resin from dipterocarp trees for part of their income. The concessionaires do not recognise the legal prohibitions on cutting resin trees and have violated them with impunity. Some companies themselves estimate that more than 80% of their annual harvest is composed of these trees.

Pressure on the Cambodian government to curtail the activities of the concessionaires prompted a moratorium on concession operations in 2002. An independent forest-sector review undertaken in 2004 recommended this suspension be made permanent and that the entire system be terminated. The ITTO mission’s report, however, perversely links restriction on concession activities with an increase in illegal logging, a conclusion that disregards the well-documented evidence of large-scale violations by the logging companies over several years.

Equally misguided are the report’s recommendations that the Cambodian government allocate other areas of production forest to annual coupes and proceed with the development of industrial tree plantations. Annual coupes appear likely to be even more subject to abuse and resistant to regulation than the concessions. With respect to tree plantations, moreover, the mission has completely failed to grasp the manner in which such schemes are already being used as a cover for the illegal clearcutting of Cambodia’s natural forests, often by the same logging syndicates that control the logging concessions.

In summary, the ITTO diagnostic mission did not face up to unpalatable truths that might invalidate its assumption that the best use for Cambodia’s forests must be export-oriented industrial logging. As such, its recommendations are damaging, wrong and deserve to be disregarded.

Mike Davis

*Global Witness
Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

The authors respond

Sir

Global Witness is correct in pointing out the abuses that have occurred in logging in Cambodia. The situation is indeed serious. However, the view of the ITTO mission was that simply identifying the problem was not enough—it is necessary to think of some solutions. Global Witness apparently believes that the logging ban provides that solution; the mission disagreed. Studies in several countries by FAO and many others show that logging bans are not only ineffective, they are often counterproductive. We believe this to be the case in Cambodia. The supply and price of timber in Cambodia has not declined since the logging ban was instituted and there is abundant evidence that illegal exports have continued at a high level. The logging ban has rendered such control as the government might have had even more ineffective—logging continues and the forests continue to be lost. If nothing is done then the forests will continue to be lost and degraded. In these circumstances the mission felt that re-opening some concessions with strict safeguards was one of the measures that could help to reassert control. We noted that the international community stood ready with a well-thought-through package of assistance to provide the needed safeguards.

Others have suggested that logging on an industrial scale should be permanently abandoned and all forestry should be given over to local control. We judged that the local capacity to manage such a process would take a long time to develop—perhaps decades—and that although this was an attractive option for the long term it would be insufficient to address the short-term emergency. There is a lot of evidence from other countries that in forest-rich situations and with sparse populations, concessions provide the most easily regulated approach to forest management.

Another point on which our assessment differs from that of Global Witness is that we concluded that, in the medium term, land conversion for local agriculture and estate crops constitutes the main threat to Cambodia’s forests. These threats may be exacerbated under a logging ban, especially as land-clearing can be exploited as a loophole to gain access to valuable timber with no obligation to manage the resource—there is considerable evidence that this is happening in Cambodia. It is probably inevitable that much of Cambodia’s forest will anyway be cleared for agro-industries in the longer term and again we felt that concessions with strong safeguards provide some disincentives to conversion.

Deforestation in Brazil

The overall rate of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon increased significantly in 2004 compared to 2003, according to the latest report from Brazil's Institute for Environment and Natural Resources (IBAMA).

Total deforestation in the Amazon was an estimated 2.61 million hectares; this is an increase of 6% over 2003 but still below the highest recorded level of about 2.8 million hectares in 1995. Of the area deforested in 2004, 1.25 million hectares were in the state of Mato Grosso. The deforestation rate actually declined in some states: by 44% in Tocantins, 39% in Amazonia, 26% in Maranhão, 18% in Acre and 2% in Pará. Actions against illegal logging, on the other hand, increased: in 2004 IBAMA filed 6500 notices for logging-related infractions in the Amazon, which was an 80% increase over 2003; seizures of illegally-harvested timber declined from 70 000 m³ in 2003 to 60 000 m³ in 2004. The main cause of deforestation was agriculture, particularly the expansion of soybean production in Mato Grosso.

Peru wins award from NGO

The Government of Peru received a 'gift to the Earth' award from the environmental organisation Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) last March. The award was made for the government's leading role in the establishment of the Alto Purus National Park and the Purus Communal Reserve in the Peruvian Amazon. During the award ceremony, Peru's President, Alejandro Toledo, asked international creditors to exchange 30% of the country's bilateral debt for conservation. He also announced the creation of the National Institute of Development of the Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Communities (INDEPA).

Global Witness also raises the issue of resin-tappers. Our report specifically highlighted the need for special measures to protect the livelihoods of these and other forest-dependent people. The trees that they tap can persist in managed forests—they will not be available in soybean fields or palm-oil estates. However, we also noted that resin-tappers are amongst the poorest people in Cambodia. Evidence from other countries suggests that as the economy grows and other economic opportunities become available many people abandon resin-tapping. The challenge—as our report points out—is to protect the interests of such people during periods of transition to new forms of livelihood, a time when such people tend to be very vulnerable.

The situation is indeed serious. However, the view of the ITTO mission was that simply identifying the problem was not enough—it is necessary to think of some solutions.

Overall we share many of the concerns that Global Witness has highlighted. Where we disagree is in the solutions. If nothing is done, the deterioration of Cambodia's valuable forests will certainly continue, and probably accelerate. A few large concessions with strong safeguards provide the best option for halting the decline. We judged that the potential for putting these safeguards into place is there and that this course of action provides the best way forward in the short term. Simply resorting to hand-wringing and arm-waving will not solve any problems and the way forward espoused by Global Witness may accelerate the decline of Cambodia's forests.

Jeff Sayer, Efransjah, Sheikh Ibrahim, Misao Ishijima and Xuhe Chen

The Earthscan forestry library

Earthscan is offering a package of six forestry publications in English as 'the Earthscan forestry library'. The collection, which was overseen by Jeffrey Sayer, addresses key issues and innovations in the policies, practices and theories that are shaping forestry. Titles in the series include: *The sustainable forestry handbook* (2005; 2nd edition) by Sophie Higman, James Mayers, Stephen Bass, Neil Judd and Ruth Nussbaum; *The forest certification handbook* (2005; 2nd edition) by Ruth Nussbaum and Markku Simula; *Plantations, privatization, poverty and power* (2005) by Michael Garforth and James Mayers; *Policy that works for forests and people* (2004) by James Mayers and Stephen Bass; *Forests in landscapes* (forthcoming) edited by Jeffrey Sayer and Stewart Maginnis; and *Politics of decentralization* (forthcoming) edited by Carol Pierce Colfer and Doris Capistrano. The series costs £154.85 and is available at www.earthscan.co.uk.

Courses

Curso internacional en principios teórico-prácticos de la restauración ecológica

14–25 November 2005

Ciudad de Santa Clara, Cuba

Language: Spanish only

El curso persigue los siguientes objetivos:

Objetivo general: Actualizar y elevar el nivel de conocimientos en aspectos teórico-práctico sobre manejo de la flora, la fauna silvestre, y otros elementos del ecosistema para desarrollar sobre bases científicas, la restauración de ecosistemas degradados.

Objetivos específicos:

- 1) Desarrollar sobre la base del marco teórico y metodológico para restauración ecológica desarrollado por GCRE, la visión general sobre la aplicación de la técnica de restauración;
- 2) Conocer la estrategia metodológica y aspectos teóricos necesarios para la confección de la línea base de un proyecto de restauración ecológica, sobre la base de la realización de estudios de flora, vegetación, fauna y otros elementos del ecosistema en áreas naturales;
- 3) Conocer las bases teórico—metodológicas de los elementos de silvicultura necesarios para garantizar el manejo correcto de los elementos naturales objeto de estudio (suelos, bosques, viveros, fuego, etc.);
- 4) Conocer los aspectos teóricos—metodológicos para la realización de estudios ecológicos en ecosistemas naturales;
- 5) Vincular los aspectos teóricos con actividades prácticas que refuercen los conocimientos adquiridos.

El Comité Organizador asegurará a los participantes el disfrute de un programa de alto rigor científico y de actualidad, que será desarrollado mediante conferencias y clases prácticas impartidas por profesores de vasta experiencia y alto nivel académico.

Informes: MSc. Jesús Matos Mederos, jesusmatos@medscape.com o ffauanavc@enet.cu

By featuring these courses ITTO doesn't necessarily endorse them. Potential applicants are advised to obtain further information about the courses of interest and the institutions offering them.