

Forests and illegal logging

A Progressio guide

So what do we need to do to combat illegal logging?

We know that to really help those communities – and nations - affected by illegal logging we need to sort out the timber trade including the demand end of the supply chain.

So it's vital that consumers join forces with environmental and development charities, governments and the timber businesses to bring to an end this criminal trade. This would close the door on illegally logged wood ever entering our markets and homes.

What can you do to help?

There are a few things we can all do. First, we need to buy certified sustainable timber and paper products.

And secondly, we need to keep acting together. Progressio is keeping up the pressure for the UK to implement strong laws. You can help by checking out www.progressio.org.uk/logging or email campaigns@progressio.org.uk

Who are Progressio?

Progressio is a charity that works in an unusual way. It gives people, not money, to communities overseas. The people it gives are highly skilled, and they work intensively alongside poor communities.

By sharing their know-how and expertise, our development workers have a lasting impact. It's unusual, but brilliant. We call it 'people powered development'.

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Photo: Rosa del Carmen Chavez is pictured beside a balsam tree in El Salvador. The balsam is used to make a variety of products and is managed responsibly so the whole community can benefit.

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Forests are important to poor communities around the world for lots of reasons. They protect natural resources like water, support other plants and animals, decrease the devastating effects of big environmental events like hurricanes and climate change, and are a source of enjoyment and beauty for people.

But all over the world forests are under threat from illegal logging (cutting down the trees without permission). Illegal logging is bad for people's rights and poverty levels, it encourages corruption, it causes climate change, and means consumers have to buy timber obtained illegally.

Last year Progressio campaigners successfully helped to ban illegal timber from the EU. Result! But we're not 'out of the woods yet' - there's still plenty of work to be done in the UK and in the EU.

The Silent Forest

A tale from Haiti

In the Artibonite region of Haiti, lies the 'desolate savannah' (savane désolée). Myth holds that it was named after an event that occurred there many years ago.

People say that in this area there was a thick, dense wood called the Silent Forest. It seemed as if the wind had never blown through the trees. It was permanently dark; the thick canopy blocked out the sun's rays. The local people feared to enter the Silent Forest even though water shortages meant life was tough for them.

There was a family whose youngest child, a very inquisitive boy, started thinking how the community could be saved; the small boy saw that the trees of the Silent Forest were alive and there was never a single withered leaf.

The little one entered the woods. Suddenly a voice boomed, "What do you want my son? Do you want water to drink?" And the boy – although he was scared of the invisible voice - responded, "Yes sir, for me and my family. We're dying of thirst and hunger". The voice rumbled again, "Take some water; but you must not cut down trees or put your mouth directly into the water."

The boy ran back to his family to carry the message and the offer of water from The Silent Forest. "Incredible!" the people shouted excitedly. "Let's go and see if it's true. Nobody has dared enter the forest before."

And so groups of strong men well prepared with sharp machetes went into The Silent Forest. They did not encounter any difficulties. The Forest opened its branches and the bushes gave way to the men who were guided by the small child.

But the men forgot what the boy had said and started drinking from the spring and dipping their heads and their bodies. They then cut down many trees. After a short while they had consumed all the spring water and they began cutting down the bushes and digging in search of the source of the water.

Suddenly, the same commanding voice shouted from within: "Enough! Enough! Men are now forbidden to return to this forest to continue destroying it." The tops of the trees opened once more for a brief moment so that the villagers could see how the reptiles, birds and mammals had always lived and played in The Silent Forest, a majestic wonder now denied to them forever.

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For the full version, see progressio.org.uk/bigforestpicnic
Photo: Alejandro, a villager in Honduras, reforestating © Nick Sireau/ Progressio

Life after logging

In Honduras, people who used to work in the illegal logging trade, like the 80 families in the Plan Grande community, are finding alternative ways to make a living. This is the next step to ensure their forests are protected. And Progressio is there helping it to happen.

Former loggers have now begun to grow banana and yucca. And the Plan Grande community is trying to introduce other alternative crops such as cocoa and lychees. And at least one young man from each of the 80 families is now working on one of the local fishing boats, helping them to diversify their incomes.

Popol Nah Tun, a local organisation, is working with a skilled Progressio development worker to train people and equip them with farming techniques that avoid burning down forests to grow food. Instead they are caring for the environment and growing crops using organic fertilizers.

"We and our neighbours here in Plan Grande are lucky," says community member Oscar. "Unlike others, we do not lack water. But the population is growing and demand for water is expected to increase. If we are not careful with water, what will the future hold for us?"

The community has also started a nursery to recover lost plant species, and is planting fruit trees and other non timber-yielding trees. Oscar feels both the community and the municipality Forest Consultation Committees (local groups charged with managing forest resources) in which he takes part are making progress.

Nuria Zayas is a Progressio development worker in Honduras.

