

Book reviews

Illegal Logging — Law Enforcement, Livelihoods and the Timber Trade

Luca Tacconi (ed.)

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Illegal logging is well recognised as a significant problem on a global scale and as a major constraint on international efforts to enhance the management, conservation and sustainable development of the world's forests. The issues associated with illegal logging are many and complex, and combating the trade in forest products suspected to have come from illegal harvesting operations is very difficult.

This new Earthscan book on illegal logging, edited by Luca Tacconi, includes contributions from many authors with considerable knowledge of the issues. It examines the issues of law and enforcement, supply and demand, corruption, forest certification, poverty, local livelihoods, international trade and biodiversity conservation. It also presents a number of well-researched case studies from around the world.

As Frances Seymour from CIFOR indicates in her foreword, illegal logging is an issue of profound importance both for forests and the communities that depend on them. The underlying causes of illegal logging are many and varied, and in some cases deeply entrenched, which means that the problem of illegal logging is difficult to fix and therefore is likely to be with us for some time.

This book had its origins in the research on illegal logging being carried out at the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), particularly focusing on improving understanding of the various causes of illegal logging, identifying negative or inequitable effects of policies aimed at combating illegal logging, and understanding the role of forest certification in dealing with the issues.

Michael Pendleton draws on his work in North America to challenge the perception that illegal logging is a harmful act in order to understand why it persists at such an astounding level. His research suggests that illegal logging is not universally viewed as wrong and that being illegal does not necessarily mean it is without merit, at least in some situations. He concludes that illegal logging persists not simply because of financial incentives, but because it performs social functions essential to the preservation of the forest community.

Anne Casson and Krystof Obidzinski examine the shifting dynamics of illegal logging in Kalimantan, Indonesia. Their study concludes that illegal timber extraction and processing of timber is an extensive and deeply entrenched system, with economic as well as socio-political dimensions. It provides employment opportunities that are well paid in comparison to conventional

opportunities, contributes substantially to a multitude of allied businesses and district budgets, and is an important source of income for civilian and military bureaucracies in the districts. It is therefore regarded by many as a structurally important element of rural life in Kalimantan. Given this situation the Indonesian government faces a daunting task of stamping out corruption within a complex and well-entrenched system that cuts across all levels of society.

David Kaimowitz explains how in some situations where rural communities are intimately associated with forests for their livelihoods and subsistence, greater enforcement of forestry and conservation laws can harm rural livelihoods. This is because existing legislation often prohibits activities such as fuelwood collection and hunting upon which millions of poor rural households depend, because millions live on lands classified by governments as protected forests and are therefore considered as forest encroachers, and because often the rural poor do not have the capacity to complete the paperwork required to legitimise small-scale forestry activities.

Another case study from Central America, by Adrian Wells and others, found that small-scale rural forest producers often have few options but to break or avoid the law. The transaction costs of complying with complex and unrealistic regulations mean that legal forest production is often uneconomic — especially in markets that are flooded with cheaper, illegally-sourced timber.

Sofia Hirakuri presents an interesting comparative analysis of sustainable forest management and law enforcement for Brazil and Finland. The analysis indicates that there is potential to replicate some aspects of forest regulation, extension and market mechanisms, commonly applied in European countries, in forest-rich developing countries like Brazil. There are, however, many other factors associated with differences in culture, land tenure and attitudes to government authority that will be much more difficult to address.

Luca Tacconi presents a useful discussion of the important issue of verification and certification of forest products and the role it may have in combating illegal logging. One of the major impediments to addressing illegal logging stems from the fact that the cost of producing illegal timber is considerably lower than that of legal timber, and the costs of forest certification and chain-of-custody systems further increase the cost of legally sourced timber. Given this situation, timber producers will take

up certification only if either there is a price premium or the market demands this form of verification. Added to this are the problems caused by the reality that many developing country domestic markets and some non-environmentally sensitive international markets are unlikely to demand certified wood products in the near future.

The most common perception of the causes of illegal logging is the inability of governments to enforce forest-related laws as well as the problem of corruption within governments, bureaucracies and the private sector. This book, however, clearly illustrates that the causes are much wider than this and highlights the fact that in some cases law enforcement can have negative impacts on rural livelihoods. This has led to an understanding

of the need to differentiate between illegal logging for need and illegal logging for greed, and to establish different strategies to address each situation.

The book makes a very significant contribution to improving global understanding of the nature of the illegal logging problem and its impacts. It also presents a series of policy options to guide efforts of those involved in combating illegal logging.

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