

Trick or Treat?

REDD, Development and Sustainable Forest Management



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One REDD negotiator to another...

Preface

The ability of the negotiators under the UNFCCC to achieve a robust agreement on REDD, one that is not threatened by perverse outcomes or unintended consequences, is being undermined by attempts to introduce language and concepts from the forestry sector that some negotiators are unfamiliar with and may fail to understand the implications of. Terms and phrases that have wide currency in forestry circles can be misleading, confusing and open to numerous interpretations. If included in the legal language of a REDD agreement under the UNFCCC, they would import these uncertainties into a climate agreement and could undermine attempts to tackle climate change. The Bali Action Plan mandates negotiators to address the “role of ...sustainable management

of forests...” in mitigation, but the negotiating text introduced by the European Union and others, at the June negotiating meeting in Bonn, called for ‘promoting sustainable forest management’ (SFM) to be an objective of REDD. This move to promote and elevate SFM and the subtle change in language is a worrying development. Whereas the terms sustainable management of forests and sustainable forest management appear interchangeable, they in fact mean quite different things. If you do not understand the difference between the two, and the implications of this, then please do read this briefing.

In accordance with the use of the term SFM by many in the forest sector, we use it here to describe industrial-scale logging, and not low impact forest uses such as gathering non-timber forest products like medicinal plants and forest foods.

“Industrial timber production has a poor record in Africa. Over the past sixty years, there is little evidence that it has lifted rural populations out of poverty or contributed in other meaningful and sustainable ways to local and national development.”¹

CIRAD, World Bank, and CIFOR, 2007. Forests in Post-Conflict Democratic Republic of Congo: Analysis of a Priority Agenda.



In order to deliver on its potential, REDD must prioritise the protection of primary forests. Papua New Guinea, 2007

Recommendations

one

The REDD agreement under the UNFCCC should include a specific objective to protect primary forests in developing countries from deforestation or further degradation.

two

The REDD agreement should explicitly exclude any funds being used to support or subsidise activities which result in carbon emissions, including industrial logging.

three

REDD funds should empower indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities to develop strategies to prevent encroachment and illegal activities, for example through independent forest monitoring.

four

REDD should support sustainable alternatives to industrial logging that contribute lasting and equitable development benefits to forest communities and the economies of developing countries.

five

REDD should support the restoration of degraded forests using mixed indigenous species.

six

There should be no reference to SFM in the REDD agreement. If reference to sustainable management of forests is included, it should be subsidiary to the protection of intact natural forests, and it should be clear that management activities resulting in carbon emissions are excluded.

Introduction

The scope of activities that will be included in a potential REDD mechanism is currently being negotiated under the UNFCCC. Some parties have proposed that “*sustainable forest management*” (SFM) should be included within this scope, using the argument that it promotes economic development. Moreover, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, which comprises 14 inter-governmental organisations,^a is promoting SFM as “*an effective framework for forest-based climate change mitigation and adaptation*”.² However, SFM is a poorly defined term that in practice has included highly destructive activities such as industrial-scale logging in intact natural (primary) forests. Industrial logging is a major source of carbon emissions,³ increases the likelihood that a forest will be converted to other land use, and has failed to bring meaningful development benefits to forest communities, or to provide lasting economic benefits to tropical^b forest-rich countries. REDD provides the opportunity to break the cycle of industrial-scale timber extraction and deforestation by placing economic value on the role of standing forests in climate change mitigation. For REDD to be successful, it must support alternatives to industrial-scale logging that protect forest carbon and ecosystems and provide equitable, lasting and sustainable development benefits to forested developing countries.

The international donor community has already spent tens of billions of dollars since the late 1980s trying to reduce deforestation and harness forests for economic growth in developing countries.⁴ These investments have consistently emphasised industrial timber production as the means to this end. Despite

a CIFOR, FAO, ITTO, IUCN, IUFRO, CBD, GEF, UNCCD, UNFF, UNFCCC, UNDP, UNEP, World Agroforestry Centre and World Bank. See <http://www.fao.org/forestry/media/12448/1/0/> for details of members.

b The term ‘tropical’ or ‘tropical’ when used in this brief to denote forest biomes, is a reference to forests in both tropical and sub-tropical regions.

these investments, the tropical regions of Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia lost around 1.2 million km² of forest between 1990 and 2005 – an area the size of France, Germany and the UK combined.⁵ A previous report by Global Witness drew on a growing body of scientific literature to describe how industrial logging is a major source of carbon emissions, a primary cause of degradation in natural forests, and can lead to deforestation.³

In almost all cases where industrial SFM has been attempted in tropical forests it has failed to provide the only meaningful public benefit expected: lasting economic development. Given that REDD funds have the potential to provide an alternative, non-destructive and low-carbon development pathway in poor but forest-rich countries, there seems to be no logical reason to include a highly carbon emissive activity in any REDD agreement. If REDD is going to avoid the failures of the past, it must be recognised as an opportunity to develop alternatives to industrial-scale logging, not to subsidise its expansion, which in turn results in significant carbon emissions. The reason for opposing the inclusion of SFM within the scope of REDD is that it risks opening the door for industrial logging to receive financing from money intended to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. Moreover, because much of the industrial logging in the tropics is carried out by foreign companies, such subsidies would be at the expense of small-scale local enterprise.

This briefing explains the origins and meaning of SFM and the risk associated with including it – and thus industrial logging – within the scope of REDD. It further describes how industrial logging has failed to contribute to lasting sustainable development for forest communities or tropical forest-rich countries, and discusses alternative development models that provide genuine opportunities for protecting forests and improving the livelihoods of forest communities.

Sustainable Forest Management – it sounds good, so where is the risk?

Broadly speaking, there are two answers to this question:

1. Due to the lack of a clear definition or standards, anyone can claim to be doing “SFM”, and it is impossible to prove otherwise.
2. In practice, industrial SFM operations in the tropics have failed to be sustainable or deliver genuine development benefits to forest communities or national economies. Moreover, they emit significant quantities of carbon.

SFM – no minimum standards

SFM is a poorly defined term. It made its first major international appearance in the voluntary “*Forest Principles*”, agreed at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The term was kept deliberately vague in order to achieve consensus after developed and developing countries were unable to agree on a legally binding forest convention. Since then, the term “*sustainable forest management*” or “SFM” has dominated the international forest policy agenda.

A number of regional processes have attempted to define SFM in terms of criteria and indicators, and these are considered by the international forest policy makers as the main framework for assessing SFM at the country level.⁶ However, these criteria and indicators **only list parameters that are to be measured and do not set any performance standards.**⁷ For example, they may require countries to report on the “*rate of conversion of forest cover to other uses*”,⁸ but make no judgment



Given the time it takes a tree this size to grow back, and the likelihood that it ever will, primary forest “management” in the tropics is more aptly described as timber mining. Southern Province, Cameroon, 2004

whether such conversion is desirable, or set a threshold beyond which this would be deemed unsustainable. The criteria contain a heavy emphasis on maintaining a constant or increasing flow of timber,⁹ and do not provide any safeguards concerning biodiversity or the rights of local and indigenous peoples.

The lack of clear performance thresholds has allowed high-impact industrial logging companies to call their practices “SFM” without changing those practices at all. These companies were quick to co-opt the term and use it in their communications strategies. As a result, SFM has become strongly associated with industrial forestry, without requiring any changes to status quo logging practices.

At the forest management unit level, various forest certification systems have attempted to define standards for SFM, but a large discrepancy exists between different certification standards,¹⁰ and many have been created by industry associations in order to rubber-stamp business-as-usual operations.¹¹ Forest certification was not designed as a mechanism to lower carbon emissions, and no certification system prohibits the logging of primary forests, the biggest reservoir of terrestrial carbon. Ultimately certification is voluntary and thus unable to assure the permanence of improvements made or carbon stored.

SFM – a key driver of deforestation

In theory, SFM was supposed to expand the goal of forest management beyond sustaining timber yields, but in practice many operations claiming to practice SFM fail to achieve even this, let alone achieve sustainability with regard to other non-timber values such as biodiversity. SFM as practiced by industrial logging companies frequently involves conversion of natural forests into ecologically impoverished secondary forests, with the largest and most valuable trees, some more than 500 years old, removed during the first harvest, a process more accurately described as timber “mining” than “sustainable management”.

In the tropics, the time between harvests – a legacy of Northern sustained yield forestry and typically around 30 years – is far too short to allow for the recovery of carbon stocks or regeneration of targeted tree species, particularly when logging is being done in primary forests. In practice, many forest concessions in the tropics are commercially logged out well before the end of the first rotation.¹² Converting primary tropical forests into secondary managed forest means losing much of the biodiversity, diminishing the natural resilience of the primary forest, and releasing carbon accumulated over centuries into the atmosphere.

SFM has proven to be particularly ill-suited to the tropics for both ecological and socio-economic reasons. Tropical forest ecosystems are typically far more complex and biodiverse than those of the North, are highly dependent on fragile micro-climates created by intact forest canopies, and provide cash-poor communities with their basic needs (e.g. fuel wood, food, and medicine). Industrial logging has failed to deliver development benefits that equal those delivered by traditional forest uses, or proved itself able to manage tropical forests sustainably.

SFM has also proven to be difficult if not impossible to regulate due to inadequate forest law enforcement and poor governance. Most countries which stand to benefit from REDD suffer to varying degrees from: poor legal frameworks, poor enforcement of even good legal frameworks, illegal logging (both by legitimate and illicit actors), non-compliance with relevant laws and guidelines, corruption and patronage between political and business elites and the logging industry, and weak institutions.

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FSC in action. Boreal clearcuts as large as 10,000 hectares (almost twice the size of Manhattan) have proven to be consistent with SFM certification standards.

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The Northern model of sustained yield forestry is based on conversion of primary forests to managed stands. Ontario, Canada 2004



SFM – can the climate wait?

The climate crisis requires rapid action to address tropical deforestation and forest degradation. However, since the advent of “SFM”, and despite donors spending three-quarters of a billion dollars annually¹³ on international forestry assistance in the tropics, deforestation rates have increased. Many of the leading proponents of SFM in the tropics, such as the World Bank, concede that, historically, SFM has not delivered the economic or development benefits expected of it, and nor has it proved to be sustainable.¹⁴ Even where those donors have invested considerable sums of money and effort in the forestry sector they have been unable to promote forest management practices that are truly sustainable. The question is whether REDD should perpetuate this experiment, especially given the high stakes, the urgency of the situation and the past record of failure. It is sobering to examine some of these failures:

- In 1990, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the leading international timber trade body, set as its “Objective 2000” that all tropical forests would be sustainably managed by the year 2000.¹⁵ By 2005, with only 7% of tropical production forests under

sustainable management, ITTO had fallen 93% short of its target.¹⁶

- In 1997, the World Bank and WWF announced a joint program with the goal of bringing 200 million hectares of forest managed for timber production under “independently certified sustainable management” by 2005. They achieved just 31.8 million hectares (16% of the target), only a third of which was in tropical forests.¹⁷ Undaunted, the programme was renewed, with a new target of 300 million hectares set for 2010, but with the far less ambitious, and vague goal of ‘improved forest management’.¹⁸
- In 2004, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) announced its intention to “promote the sustainable management of forest resources and critical ecosystems through the eradication of unsustainable practices” as part of the Vientiane Action Plan.¹⁹ Five years later the FAO estimates that deforestation rates in ASEAN countries are likely to continue at the 2000-2005 levels of 3.7 million hectares per year.²⁰

**ITTO Objective 2000: Progress towards SFM,
1990 - 2005**



 SFM

**WWF/WB Alliance: Progress towards SFM,
1997 - 2005**



 SFM

Industrial logging: a failed model for sustainable development

Proponents of industrial logging justify its expansion by arguing that it contributes to sustainable development and poverty alleviation. These claims are questionable on the grounds of sustainability alone, given the industry's environmental record. However, there is also mounting evidence that industrial logging does not contribute meaningfully to development, particularly for communities living in and around forests.

Tropical forests have not fared well under the industrial logging regimes of the past half century. In nearly every tropical country where industrial logging has taken hold, from the Philippines to Indonesia, Ghana to Brazil, rapid deforestation has ensued. Indonesia lost 50 million hectares of tropical forest between 1950 and 2000²¹ – an area the size of Spain – and in 2000 a World Bank review concluded that *“commercial logging has played a leading role in deforestation and forest degradation in Indonesia”*.²² A recent study in Brazil found that about one-third of logged forest was cleared within four years.²³

While logging may not be the proximal cause of deforestation in many cases, it plays a key facilitating role in the process. In Cameroon, the World Bank concluded that *“While smallholder slash-and-burn agriculture and fuelwood demand are widely believed to be responsible for about 90 percent of the deforestation, these factors are often secondary effects of tropical timber harvesting that degrades forest cover and contributes to associated declines in biodiversity.”*²⁴ In addition, in regions such as the Congo Basin, where

logging is less intense due to a low density of commercially valuable tree species, the ecological impoverishment of forests from widespread degradation has serious implications for ecosystems and the people that depend on them.

The international donor community has consistently prioritised reforms in the industrial logging sector in tropical forests but has had little impact on sustainability. Today, tropical deforestation is occurring at an unprecedented rate, while logging continues to expand into new tracts of primary rainforest, often aided by the policies, and direct or indirect financing from international donors.

Inequity, exclusion and conflict

Many people in developing countries are dependent on forests for their basic needs. The majority of rural Africans rely on wood as their only source of energy for cooking and other uses. In the DRC, where two-thirds of the population, or roughly 40 million people, depend on forests for a major part of their livelihoods, a recent study estimated the value of food and fuel derived from forests at roughly \$2 billion a year.¹ The World Bank estimated in 1998 that 30 million people in Indonesia were *“directly and substantially”* dependent on forests.²²

Concession-based industrial logging puts the majority of accessible forests into the hands of a few large companies. In least developed nations, such as Papua New Guinea and the countries of the Congo Basin, the forest sector is often controlled by foreign companies. Around 80% of the logging in Papua New Guinea is carried out by Malaysian companies;²⁵ in Cameroon, 80% of timber production is controlled by less than 20 (mostly European) companies.²⁶ The DRC recently approved the allocation of roughly 97,000 km² of mostly intact forest to a group of logging companies, almost all of them foreign. An area the size of Switzerland, for example, was allocated to just two European logging companies.²⁷

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Industrial logging in the tropics, under the guise of SFM, has failed to deliver development benefits. Province Orientale, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2007



REDD is at risk of allowing natural forests like the one on the right to be replaced with intensively managed plantations, releasing massive amounts of carbon in the process. Peru, 2006.

The vast forest resources and international donor support allotted to industrial logging operations translate into a relatively small number of jobs, most of which are unskilled and low-wage, and yield modest government tax revenues. A recent review found that tax revenues from timber for the five largest countries of the Congo Basin were less than \$130 million combined.²⁸ The Republic of Congo receives around \$20 million in tax revenues²⁹ from the forest sector, compared with roughly \$3 billion in oil revenues (in 2007).³⁰ Even in countries with a well-developed logging industry, formal employment typically accounts for less than 0.5% of the total workforce, according to the FAO.³¹ In Cameroon, formal employment in the forest sector is around 15,000, while agriculture provides the livelihoods for around 2 million people.³² Overall, formal forest sector employment opportunities are tiny compared with the number of forest-dependent people whose livelihoods are negatively impacted, often permanently, as logging operations deplete the resources and degrade the ecological services provided by natural forests.

In Liberia, Cameroon, and Ghana – least developed countries where industrial logging has been the dominant commercial use of forests – rural poverty and key human development indicators have shown little if any improvement. Indeed, in a 2007 report, CIRAD, the World Bank, and CIFOR concluded that: *“Industrial timber production has a poor record in Africa. Over the past sixty years, there is little evidence that it has lifted rural populations out of poverty or contributed in other meaningful and sustainable ways to local and national development.”*³¹

In Cambodia, the World Bank and other donors attempted to introduce reforms to improve the industrial concession system, with little success in improving sustainability or rural livelihoods. Following a complaint by local NGOs about the World Bank’s performance in Cambodia, the Bank’s Inspection Panel wrote, in 2006, that *“... one could hardly overemphasise the negative effects of the logging on a natural habitat of world class value and most importantly on very poor and vulnerable rural communities and indigenous peoples”* and found that industrial logging had *“contributed to significant degradation of Cambodia’s natural forests and has hastened the conversion of forests to other forms of land use”*.³³

A recent study of human development indicators in communities on Brazil’s forest frontier found that the conversion of forests to other land uses, a process *“mediated by logging”*, did not result in improvements in standard of living, literacy rates, or life expectancy for the frontier communities.³⁴

The exclusion and further impoverishment of local communities results in additional pressure on forest resources and often leads to social conflicts. The World Bank describes the impacts of *“large-scale commercial interests”* in Indonesia as follows: *“Not only has the use of forest resources been unsustainable, the distribution of the benefits has been highly inequitable... Indonesian forest policy has subordinated the traditional rights of indigenous forest dwellers and communities dependent on forests for their livelihoods. The denial of access to forest resources has resulted in conflict and created one of the most serious social problems facing Indonesia at present.”*²²

“... one could hardly overemphasise the negative effects of the logging on a natural habitat of world class value and most importantly on very poor and vulnerable rural communities and indigenous peoples” World Bank’s Inspection Panel on Cambodia, 2006

The Right Priorities for REDD

An effective REDD mechanism needs to reduce carbon emissions. In order to do this it will need to protect primary forests, restore degraded forests, and support alternatives to industrial logging that bring lasting and sustainable development benefits that ensure ecosystem resilience. Ultimately, REDD must support development in local communities that will serve to relieve pressure on remaining primary forests, while building a firm foundation of good governance.

1. Protection of Primary Forests

Maintaining primary forests must be REDD's top priority, as these forests store the most carbon and improve permanence through greater resiliency than degraded forests. Within the primary forests that remain, REDD funds should be used to empower local communities to

develop strategies to prevent encroachment and illegal activities, through participatory monitoring and enforcement. This could include training and capacity building in independent forest monitoring and the use of modern forest management tools such as geographic information systems (GIS).

With regard to the use of forests under the stewardship of indigenous peoples and forest dependent communities, the right of free, prior and informed consent should be respected, and under REDD, if they should choose this path, these peoples and communities should be able to benefit from pursuing traditional and non timber-based activities, to the extent that they do not compromise the forest's ecological integrity or reduce its carbon carrying capacity.

2. Restoration of Degraded Forests

Degraded forest, often stripped of its most valuable trees by industrial logging and fragmented by logging roads, is up to four times more vulnerable to conversion to agriculture and other uses than undisturbed forests.³⁵ REDD should support the restoration of these forests using mixed indigenous species, bringing them back to their full carbon carrying capacity and ecological function (including the ability to withstand fire and drought).

3. Activities that Relieve Pressure on Primary Forests

The protection of primary forests will be dependent on the success of development efforts in areas adjacent to these forests, including restoration of degraded forest, reforestation of deforested areas, and development of alternative livelihoods. While some development activities may be forest-related (such as restorative management activities aimed at bringing degraded forest back), others may be cross-sectoral (enhancing agricultural productivity in a way that maintains and enhances ecosystem functions through, for example, agro-forestry and plantations of mixed indigenous species on degraded land, providing energy alternatives to fuelwood, etc) or stimulating other sectors of the economy.

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REDD must prioritise the protection of primary forests, as the largest and most resilient reservoirs of terrestrial carbon. Papua New Guinea, 2007

“Community-based forest enterprises tend to invest more in the local economy than their private-sector equivalents, fostering social cohesion and longer-term equity and making greater social investment” – Key finding from the ITTO/RRI/Forest Trends Report on Community-based Forest Enterprises in Tropical Forest Countries, 2008



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Well regulated small-scale community-based forest enterprises can maximise the value obtained from each tree, with profits invested back into local development efforts. Brazil, 2008

Small-scale enterprises foster equity and accountability

Non-primary forests may also provide opportunities for well-controlled small-scale sustainable harvesting of timber and non-timber forest products that maintains carbon stocks and ecosystem resilience, and that does not make the forest vulnerable to conversion.

Small-scale and community-based forest enterprises that are consistent with REDD objectives offer an alternative to industrial forestry, provided they are rooted in a well governed regulatory system. They tend to be more grounded in the communities in which they operate and generate greater employment than the transnational corporations that dominate industrial forestry.^c The wealth generated through smaller operations has a better chance of remaining within the community and supporting the livelihoods of the rural poor,³⁶ since revenues and employment are more likely to be distributed equitably.



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One of the main barriers for small-scale and community-based operations is competition from industrial and illegal logging that flood the market with large volumes of timber and keeps prices unsustainably low. At the very minimum, safeguards must be in place to prevent REDD funds from subsidizing industrial logging, whether dubbed “SFM” or not.

c As with any commercial activity in the forests, these would need to be subject to appropriate social, environmental and governance safeguards.



Conclusions

REDD may well represent our last, best chance at saving the world's few remaining primary forests and safeguarding the communities that depend on them, in order to reduce forest-related carbon emissions and to protect the forests' carbon carrying capacity. However, the inclusion of loopholes such as SFM in REDD would allow for industrial logging – one of the key drivers of forest degradation and a major source of carbon emissions – to continue unabated and to be funded by the very mechanism that is supposed to stop this destruction. We cannot repeat the mistake made at UNCED in Rio in 1992, allowing this vague term to undermine the integrity of a forest agreement in the interest of achieving consensus. By opening the door to industrial logging, the inclusion of SFM in any REDD agreement threatens the integrity of REDD and the effectiveness of the climate regime as a whole.

Just as SFM offers no guarantees of ecological sustainability, it also fails to provide any minimum assurance of development benefits, leaving REDD communities at the mercy of industrial logging interests. Fortunately, alternatives exist, such as development based on non-timber forest products, payment for ecosystem services, and community-based, small scale and low-intensity harvesting in second growth forests providing it is well-controlled, founded on good governance, and is ecologically sustainable. These alternatives, and the low-carbon pathway to development that they support, will only become viable if we stop the flow of timber from high-impact industrial and illegal operations, especially from primary forests. REDD could assist in these efforts, but only if it retains its ecological integrity, sets the right priorities, and is not used to subsidise industrial logging operations.

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Acronyms

- ASEAN** Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- CABS** Center for Applied Biodiversity Science (Conservation International)
- CBD** Convention on Biological Diversity
- CIFOR** Center for International Forestry Research
- CIRAD** Centre de Cooperation Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement
- DRC** Democratic Republic of the Congo
- FAO** United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
- FERN** Forests and the European Union Resource Network
- GEF** Global Environment Facility
- GIS** geographic information systems
- ITTC** International Tropical Timber Council (governing body of the ITTO)
- ITTO** International Tropical Timber Organization
- IUCN** International Union for the Conservation of Nature
- IUFRO** International Union of Forest Research Organisations
- NGO** non-governmental organisation
- ODA** official development assistance
- ODI** Overseas Development Institute
- REDD** reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries
- RRI** Rights and Resources Institute
- SFM** sustainable forest management
- UNCED** United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
- UNCCD** United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
- UNDP** United Nations Development Programme
- UNEP** United Nations Environment Program
- UNFCCC** United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- UNFF** United Nations Forum on Forests
- WWF** World Wide Fund for Nature

All currency values quoted are in US Dollars



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“Not only has the use of forest resources been unsustainable, the distribution of the benefits has been highly inequitable... Indonesian forest policy has subordinated the traditional rights of indigenous forest dwellers and communities dependent on forests for their livelihoods. The denial of access to forest resources has resulted in conflict and created one of the most serious social problems facing Indonesia at present.” World Bank Operations Evaluation Department, 2000. *Indonesia: The challenges of World Bank involvement in forests*.

“...[industrial logging has] contributed to significant degradation of Cambodia’s natural forests and has hastened the conversion of forests to other forms of land use.” World Bank’s Inspection Panel on Cambodia, 2006

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Tumring rubber plantation. Forest was cleared in Kompong Thom Province, Cambodia, to make way for this rubber plantation.

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