

Deforestation Alert

SYNOPSIS

As the a change in climate is witnessed all over the world, the Congo Basin's rate of deforestation is being debated as the loss of trees is leading to the destruction of essential animal and tribal habitats at an increasing rate and a large amount of carbon dioxide is remaining in the atmosphere unchanged.

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SCRIPT

COMMENTARY

These chainsaws contribute to global warming: day after day they work relentlessly, cutting down the Congo Basin Forests. Due to massive deforestation 20% of greenhouse gases are no longer converted into oxygen and contribute to global warming. But intensive logging is also complicating life for the Pygmies for whom the forest is a vast pantry.

ITV, BENOÎT DIMALET, ECOGUIDE

«We Baka love the forest because it is our food pantry and our home. We don't want to destroy it because it provides us with coconuts, game and many other things. Logging companies are destroying the forest and that is causing serious climate problems. Now there is too much sun. Deforestation has created lots of problems for our way of life. »

COMMENTARY

Congo's forests are the victims of intense industrial exploitation. Deforestation advances at a rate of 0.5 to 0.6% a year. Figures that may appear insignificant but the consequences for the ecosystems are disastrous.

ITV, JOËL LOUMETO RIAT, CONGO

«It's not a lot but that's just what we are seeing today. The accumulated effect over a long period could be catastrophic. We need to be aware of the consequences of our behaviour; our agricultural techniques; the exploitation of forests and the fires we start in forest areas. »

COMMENTARY

According to a 2006 report by the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, the area of forest earmarked for exploitation has significantly increased to reach 36% of production forests and 27% of thick rainforest. As a result the area vital for the survival of forest dwellers is shrinking. Non-ligneous forestry products – an essential element in the Pygmy lifestyle - are being destroyed. Wildlife is moving further away from the villages and the socio-economic structure built up around life in the forest is increasingly precarious.

ITV, ROBERT, YANDOMBE VILLAGE

«When I was young there was thick forest and the canopy was luxuriant. It was cool – now it is hot and we can't protect ourselves from the heat. We would hunt with nets behind the village. We caught small mammals, porcupines and antelopes. The Pygmy community earned money and our life was organised around all that. The forest was good to us and we gathered a lot of honey. »

COMMENTARY

An added problem is deforestation for charcoal, which is sold on markets as fuel for cooking. An ancestral tradition but one that nonetheless has an impact on the vegetation.

The inhabitants living in and around the forest supplement their meagre incomes by providing wood for heating. Another concern is the slash and burn cultivation that further deteriorates the soil and the forest.

And finally, the galloping development of road networks in Congo is eating away at the forest. Deforestation caused by road construction in Congo Brazzaville is steadily progressing. Experts estimate that the Congolese road network increased by 156 km a year between 1976 and 1990 compared to 600 km a year since 2000. An increase that is no doubt good for the forestry sector and the country's economy. However it does raise questions about the balance between the needs of local inhabitants, the need to develop the nation and the need to protect the forests in order to limit global warming.

Plantations of communal forests managed by local inhabitants could be part of the answer ...

But how can we stop African nations selling their forests to the highest bidders to finance development? The real answer probably lies in the sustainable management of forests. Unlike black gold this green gold can renew itself ... as long as we treat it well.

END