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Solomon Islands

Indigenous peoples in the Solomon Islands are suffering from the unsustainable logging of tropical rainforest and from the increasing disappearance of the forest cover. Between the years 1990 and 2000, Solomon Islands lost an average of 39700 hectares of forest per year. This amounts to an annual deforestation rate of 1.43 %. Between the years 2000 and 2005, the deforestation rate has increased by 17 % per year to 1.68 %. Between the years 1990 and 2005, Solomon Islands lost nearly 600000 hectares of tropical forest and 21.5 % of the forest cover. Since the year 2005 the country has lost at least another 25000 hectares of primary forest.

Timber export made up to 73 % of all exports of Solomon Islands in the year 2006 and 67 % in year 2007. The timber boom cannot sustain the current logging rate because it is far above the natural replacement rate.

Furthermore illegal logging has increased due to widespread corruption. In many cases the Forestry Department of the Solomon Islands Government has failed to collect the royalty payments and fees by the logging industry. Independent audit reports documented that due to bribing of politicians and other officials the logging companies were able to avoid paying much of their tax liabilities.

Local landowners are complaining that the Government has not consulted grass-root people on their timber policy and that the authorities have refused an equal distribution of royalties and benefits. Land disputes due to jealousy and a lack of documentation of the traditional ownership of land have created tensions among indigenous peoples and between local landowners and the authorities. Only few people are profiting from the logging of communal land, the profits are not equally shared among those indigenous inhabitants suffering from deforestation.

Beyond the environmental damage logging has implied a dramatic change in the traditional way of living of the indigenous peoples in Solomon Islands. The logging industry has incited consumption of new goods, the introduction of a cash-economy and new social relations and customs. Money raised by deforestation has not been used by indigenous populations to buy additional food which traditionally was unknown and has been spent for travel and amusement in bigger cities. Logging companies have been hiring staff from abroad. These foreign loggers have incited the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the loss of traditional values of the indigenous population.

Due to the current rates of timber harvesting experts are warning that commercial forest resources could be wiped out by the year 2015.