

The Forestry Sector as an Inequality Machine? Agents, Agreements and Global Politics of Trade and Investment in the Congo Basin

Initiative: Globale Herausforderungen

Ausschreibung: Global Issues – Integrating Different Perspectives on Social Inequality

Bewilligung: 10.12.2019

Laufzeit: 4 Jahre

Forests and forestlands in the tropics are supposed to serve a multitude of global and domestic interests, including development, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation. All these interests have explicit assumptions in common over their positive contribution to the economic wellbeing and social equality of society. However, who - and whose society - benefits from ongoing deforestation and forest concessions in the tropics? The research project aims to answer this question by analyzing global and historic data to gain an understanding of the inequalities embedded in trade and investment patterns in relation to forests and forestland in the Global South, and the mechanisms that produce and reproduce these inequalities. The project will focus on the Congo Basin, specifically Cameroon and DRC, and the former colonial empires in Europe; in addition, it looks at China as a relatively new 'external partner' to this sort of trade. It analyses comparatively the institutions and incentives structures, power relations, and discursive practices in and beyond the forest sector, and investigates if international initiatives and agreements risk reproducing social inequalities. The research team explicitly aims to engage with actors across all levels and sectors and to share their findings and knowledge with wider society and publics; this constitutes the main impact pathway to inform the design of policy instruments aiming to halt deforestation and to contribute to discursive shifts in current understandings of "who should benefit from forests".

Projektbeteiligte

Prof. Dr. Maria Brockhaus

University of Helsinki
Department of Forest Sciences
Helsinki
Finland

Dr. Symphorien Ongolo

Universität Göttingen
Chair of Forest and Nature Conservation Policy
Göttingen

Patrice Bigombe Logo

Université de Yaoundé II
Faculty of Judicial and Political Science
Group for Administrative and Political Science
Research
Yaoundé
Kamerun (Cameroun)

Dr. Blaise-Pascal Ntirumenyerwa Mihigo

University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN)
Faculty of Law
Department of Public International Law
Kinshasa
Kongo (Demokratische Republik - Kinshasa)

Dr. Jianmin Xiao

Chinese Academy of Forestry
Research Institute of Forestry Policy
and Information
Beijing
China (Volksrepublik)

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