

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

Initiative: Globale Herausforderungen

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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".

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