

HAFL Master's Thesis Abstract

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Original Title: **Mining in Certified Tropical Forest Concessions
Can it cohabit?**

Summary in original language:

A growing demand for mineral resources worldwide pushes mining operations into remote and yet untouched regions of the planet. The Congo Basin spanning large parts of Equatorial Africa is one of these areas. Representing the second largest tropical rain forest on earth, the Congo Basin is a giant ecosystem harbouring a vast variety of fauna and flora and is not least the living environment for various indigenous communities.

Inside the Congo Basin near the border to Cameroon the Industrie Forestière d'Ouessou, a subsidiary of the Austrian Danzer GmbH, manages the tropical forest concession Ngombé in the Republic of the Congo. 1.16 million hectares in extent, the concession is home to several endangered species and about 15'000 partly indigenous people. From its headquarter in Ngombé, the Industrie Forestière d'Ouessou manages the concession under a Forest Stewardship Council Forest Management certification regime.

Since the Congolese authorities issued several mining exploration and exploitation permits inside the concession the company does not want to see their certification jeopardized due to negative impacts of potential large-scale industrial open-pit mines. Thus, the Industrie Forestière d'Ouessou and the Berne University of Applied Sciences, School for Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences initiated a research project aiming to evaluate negative impacts of mining on the certification and to develop measures to avoid or mitigate these impacts.

The project revealed several economic, environmental and social impacts that might evolve due to mining operations. Impacts like the fragmentation of habitats and the pollution of watercourses might damage the environment seriously. Social impacts as for example a loss of cultural heritage due to immigration of foreign workforce and the violation of customary tenure rights are likely to occur. On the other hand, improved infrastructure and employment opportunities thanks to mining projects can benefit local communities economically. However, every mining project requires the conversion of a certain, mostly rather small, forestry area into other land uses. This can violate basic claims of the Forest Stewardship Council in some circumstances and therefore, the respective area should be excised from the scope of the certification.

While evaluating remedial measures guaranteeing an ongoing certification,

the legislation of the Republic of the Congo, specific mining standards and a reasonable cohabitation amongst forest and mining companies were considered to be useful measures initially. Though, analyses revealed a rather ambiguous legal and political situation leaving several loopholes in favour of the mining industry. Mining standards as rigorous as the Forest Stewardship Council do not exist but standards such as for instance the International Finance Corporation Performance Standards or the International Council on Mining and Minerals 10 Principles might at least help to ensure the forest certification. Striving towards a cohabitation amongst forest and mining companies emerged as the most favourable remedial measure eventually.

As a result of these findings, a set of strategies was developed with the objective to establish measures promoting a sound cohabitation of forest and mining companies in the future. The strategies entail the proactive communication with mining companies, the monitoring of their activities and the suggestion to observe the development of the mining sector in the Congo Basin. Furthermore, the relation to relevant stakeholders as for instance the Congolese Mining Association should be deepened. Using this approach several negative impacts affecting the concession can be mitigated or even avoided. Nevertheless, the mined area itself should be excised from the certified forest area.

Besides implementing and improving the suggested measures the Industrie Forestière d'Ouessou should pursue the present project focusing on the behaviour of Asian mining companies and expanding it by artisanal and small-scale mining as well as by agriculture and forest plantations.

Keywords: Forestry, Mining, Certification

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