Taking control

by Meindert Brouwer

In the Democratic Republic of Congo
a transition from illegal small scale
logging to legal logging is on the rise.
Both loggers and the state benefit.

Around the city of Kisangani in the northeast, a growing
number of artisanal loggers is emerging from the dusky
informal economy to go legal and pay taxes. By doing so,
they take control of their own destiny and contribute to
the functioning of the state and to the improvement of the
livelihoods of local communities. Professor in Political
Sciences, Alphonse Maindo (49), of the University of
Kisangani and director of the Dutch NGO Tropenbos
International in DRC is a pioneer of the transition from
illegality to legality in artisanal forestry in the region around
Kisangani.

Maindo, who once received the Claude Ake Memorial
Award of the Africa-America Institute and the African
Studies Association in the United States for outstanding
young scholars, is convinced about the direction: ‘Working
formally and legally is necessary, it is mandatory. It is a
condition for good forest governance. Formal employment
means that the state will receive tax revenues. When taxes
are paid, the state can function like it should to the benefit
of all, provided that there is good governance of the public
institutions.’

He continues: ‘To the contrary, working informally means
loss of income for the state. When you work informally,
you don’t pay tax. You are not registered, you don’t exist
in the administration of the government. In fact when you
work illegally, you are vulnerable. A civil servant can come
to you and make you pay for himself. And you will not be
able to prove that you paid.’

The innovative part of the project is that forestry students
are taught to teach artisanal loggers how to manage the forest and how to
harvest timber in a sustainable way.

Alphonse Maindo: ‘We need to raise awareness about things that
do not go well and strengthen citizens and civil society so they
can speak out.’

Right: Kisangani is an important city in the northeast of the
Democratic Republic of Congo and capital of the province of Tshopo.

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of all, provided that there is good governance of the public institutions.’