

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 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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