



Wood of the Critically Endangered African zebrawood *Microberlinia bisulcata* logged illegally in Cameroon's Ebo forest.

wood is high because of its unique colour, texture and hardness. The species is not listed on the CITES appendices, although indiscriminate logging is a major problem, including a current increase in the Ebo forest, which was previously considered a safe haven for this and other species.

During August 2020–March 2021 we surveyed the Ebo forest to collect information on the rate of harvesting of this species and on the actors involved in the trade. We estimated that c. 2 t of *M. bisulcata* are smuggled out of the forest every month. In February 2020 the area was gazetted as a logging concession. Given the current rate of illegal harvesting, we predict that within the next 2 years all seed-bearing individuals will have been logged, pushing the species to the brink of extinction. We identified five groups of actors involved in the trade of this wood: initiators (landowners, or locally influential people), prospectors (local men paid to find and mark trees), harvesters (local men paid to cut the marked trees), transporters (owners of trucks paid to transport the logged wood to the nearby city of Douala) and buyers (local businessmen or foreigners). We learnt that Chinese traders based in Douala pay USD 600/m³ of *M. bisulcata* wood, the price of which has doubled since 2018. The high price is probably the main reason for the current increase in illegal commercial harvesting. In addition, however, the decision to gazette the Ebo forest as a logging concession has inadvertently encouraged local people to log valuable timber products before they are forbidden to access the forest.

Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations: (1) the Ebo forest should be gazetted as a National Park, (2) the area needs to be reforested urgently with *M. bisulcata*, (3) alternative livelihood activities need to be implemented for the people living in the vicinity of the Ebo forest, and (4) *M. bisulcata* needs to be listed on a CITES appendix, prohibiting international trade in its wood.

ERIC DJOMO NANA (orcid.org/0000-0002-6118-9359),
CECILIA MANDAH TAKOR, STANDLY NKEMNYI NKENGBEZA,
BARTHELEMY TCHIENGUE, ERIC T. NGANSOP and
EMMANUEL TCHOPWE National Herbarium of Cameroon,
Yaoundé, Cameroon. E-mail eric.nana@natconbio.org

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Gender and illegal wildlife trade: overlooked and underestimated

Despite increasing awareness globally of the need to integrate and mainstream a gendered approach in international policy arenas, there remains gender-blindness in understanding and responding to illegal wildlife trade. Research, thinking and responses to illegal wildlife trade have generally failed to look at half of the world's population, and gender issues more generally, hence missing important entry points to understand, prevent and tackle the issue. Illegal wildlife trade involves and affects men and women differently, and gender norms play an important part in influencing behaviours and attitudes along the illegal wildlife trade value chain. Put simply, failing to consider gender is like tackling wildlife crime with one hand tied behind your back. The place, role and dynamics of women and men in relation to this trade differ, so it is crucial to consider the gendered implications of illegal wildlife trade if we are to respond in an inclusive and efficient manner to improve the likelihood of conservation success.

In July 2021, WWF released a report, *Gender & Illegal Wildlife Trade: Overlooked and Underestimated*, which paves the way for more inclusive and informed responses. The report gives an overview of available gender-informed research, field evidence and concepts relating to poaching, trafficking and consumption of wildlife products, and international governance and policy. It identifies key gaps and research needs, explains why looking at illegal wildlife trade through the lens of gender is important, and provides recommendations and a practical framework to help conservation practitioners bring gender analysis into programmes, policies and interventions at local, national and global scales. This gender framework will be available online in September 2021.

Another WWF report, also released in July 2021, *Towards Gender Equality in the Ranger Workforce* highlights how greater gender equality in the ranger workforce could reduce ranger misconduct and improve conservation outcomes, relationships with communities, and park and wildlife management.

We hope these reports and the gender framework will provide a basis from which to deepen understanding around the importance of integrating gender into conservation. Research and publication were funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. For more information, contact Rob Parry-Jones, Head, Wildlife Crime Initiative