

# Irish Forestry and Overseas Development Aid

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## INTRODUCTION

An area of dense forest, greater than the size of the Republic of Ireland is being cleared each year in the tropics. This is equivalent to deforestating the Phoenix Park every 50 minutes (Gorta, 1985a). Tropical deforestation, with the consequential problems of erosion, water-shed mismanagement, loss of potential forest produce (fuelwood, lumber, fodder, food in some cases) and loss of habitat for both flora and fauna "can reasonably be seen as the most important forest question of our time" (Anonymous, 1982b).

Forest organisations and governments are reacting with growing concern and this has been expressed at several recent international meetings. For example, the IX World Forestry Congress, held in Mexico in 1985, was devoted largely to development in the tropics. In view of the magnitude and complexity of this issue, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) prepared, in 1985, an overall framework to guide future co-operation in tropical forestry. This is called the Tropical Forestry Action Plan (FAO, 1985). The plan has received broad international support: it envisages a doubling of aid to assist tropical forestry over the 5 year period 1986-1990 which, in monetary terms, would amount to US\$8 billion or a doubling of present levels of external aid to combat deforestation (WRI, 1985).

There is a general acceptance that tropical countries cannot overcome the problems on their own and solutions will involve the whole international community (Franklin, 1986; Leakey and Last, 1983; Postel, 1984). The Republic of Ireland is a member of that community and any role the country might assume should be co-ordinated with recognised international initiatives. The purpose of this paper is to outline Irish trade links with tropical countries as well as Irish aid contributions from the forestry point-of-view.

## IRELAND AND THE TROPICAL HARDWOOD TRADE

The Republic of Ireland imports the equivalent of 120,000m<sup>3</sup> of high quality roundwood lumber from the tropics annually. This material, which is valued at about IR£16 million, comes from

Africa, Latin America and Asia with 61% coming from one single country in West Africa: the Ivory Coast (Gorta, 1985a). The breakdown is shown in Figure 1.

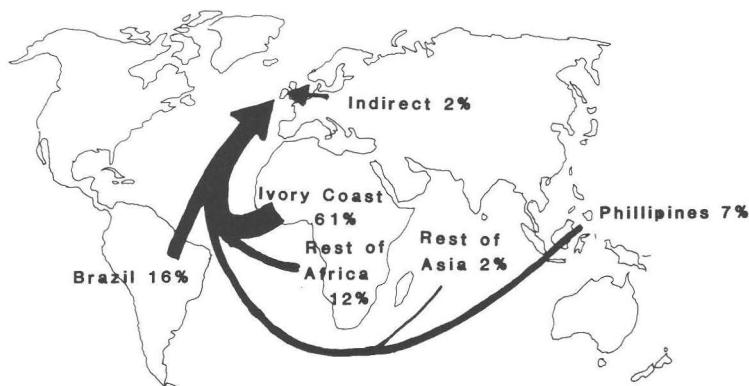


Fig 1. Imports of tropical hardwoods to the Republic of Ireland for the period January 1980 to December 1984 (Central Statistics Office, Dublin.).

The Ivory Coast is losing its tree cover at the rate of over 300,000 ha per year; this is approximately equal to the total area under state forest in Ireland. Over 70% of the area which the Ivory Coast had under trees, at the beginning of the present century, had been cleared by 1980 (Anonymous, 1982a). This clearance has significantly jeopardised the future of forestry in that country and has wasted a considerable potential wealth (Lanly and Clement, 1981). If the present rate continues unabated, the exploitable forest will disappear completely before the year 2000.

The Republic of Ireland is the Ivory Coast's best market for Iroko (Mindell, 1984). Iroko (*Chlorophora excelsa*) is commonly seen in window and door frames in Ireland and is incorrectly known in popular usage as 'teak'. About 3,000 ha of the Ivory Coast's forests are logged each year to supply the Irish market; this represents 1% of the area deforested in that country. Logging, on its own, does not result in complete deforestation but there is a strong linkage in that the forest is opened to further exploitation. This synopsis demonstrates that Irish trade does not discriminate in favour of regions of the tropics which try to maintain a sustained yield from their natural forest resources.

Timber prices of standing trees in the natural forest are negligible and are based mainly on felling and extraction costs and current demand; they are below replacement cost because no value is apportioned to the length of time it took for nature to produce them, which may be several hundred years (Richardson, 1984). Many countries which use tropical hardwoods are now examining the policies they should adopt towards importations (Huguet, 1980; Steinlin and Pretzsch, 1984; von Meijenfeldt, 1985). Several solutions have been posed, like a boycott of lumber coming from areas that mine their resources (Editorial (ORYX), 1984). Guppy (1984) advocates the establishment of an OPEC-type cartel of producing countries which would raise timber prices substantially and obtain for the exporter the same external revenue from a smaller area of forest. Decreased availability of quality wood, due to increase in price, would bring forward the day when at least parts of the market would have to find substitutes for tropical timbers.

The International Tropical Timber Organisation has come into existence recently. It is composed of 35 consuming countries and about the same number of producers. The main objective is to provide an effective framework for co-operation and consultation with regard to all relevant aspects of the tropical timber economy (UN, 1984). There is a clear indication that if tropical deforestation continues unabated then sooner or later hardwood supply will dry up and high quality lumber is unlikely to be renewed in the tropics (Sutton, 1981). Mahogany, for example, will probably be commercially extinct by 1990 (Knees and Gardner, 1979).

In the face of almost certain shortages of quality woods, countries like Ireland should consider establishing broadleaf reserves. But what area should be devoted to producing quality timber? If it was decided to supply the equivalent volume of hardwoods, which the country now imports from the tropics, an area of 15,000 ha would be needed if a yield of  $8\text{m}^3/\text{ha}/\text{year}$  could be sustained. At present 5% of the state's forests are composed of broadleaf species and this amounts to 15,000 ha. This area, however, is not being managed to produce quality wood: about 2,000 ha are currently conserved as nature reserves, whilst the remaining plantations are fragmented into small, hard to manage, parcels. However, these figures do demonstrate that the present area under broadleaves would form the base of an adequate broadleaf reserve in terms of area alone. It might be possible to substitute the scattered plantations with large blocks on good soil and manage them accordingly; this would involve cutting and replanting the small scattered areas with conifers if it was decided not to expand the present area under broadleaves. The reserve would be managed strictly for quality

timber, though it could have some recreational value also. Its value for wildlife conservation would be limited and should not be confused with old woodland nature reserves which should be managed for their conservation interests.

#### IRISH OVERSEAS AID AND TROPICAL FORESTRY

Several moves have been initiated during the present decade and these are mentioned briefly below.

In 1983, a committee was established within the Society of Irish Foresters, to explore general aspects relating to Ireland and forestry in the Third World. The first open meeting was held in University College Dublin and this was reported in *Irish Forestry* (1985 Vol. 42 (1): 53). The consensus of opinion was: "that a new effort be made to encourage greater participation by Irish institutions and Irish foresters in the development of forestry in Third World countries".

On 1 April 1985 Ireland became a member of the International Tropical Timber Organisation.

In October 1985, Gorta's World Food Day Seminar was entitled "The Forest Connection" (Gorta, 1985b); at this meeting the Minister for State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. O'Keefe, announced new moves to expand Ireland's bilateral aid programme in forestry and these got underway during 1986.

In February 1986 an international conference on forests and trees, known as the SILVA Conference, was held in Paris on the initiative of the President of the French Republic. An Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald attended and expressed his intention to examine the possibility of significantly increasing aid going towards problems caused by deforestation; this meeting is reported in *Irish Forestry* (1986 Vol. 43 (1): 80-81).

In recent years there has been a growing awareness among aid organisations and agencies in Ireland of the importance of forestry in their projects and this has been reflected in support for tree planting activities. I estimate that the total annual funding for forest related projects including multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental contributions is about IR£400,000. This is forecast to rise considerably: one Irish non-governmental organisation, Self Help, hopes to launch an IR£740,000 forest project in Ethiopia in the near future.

Parallel with these developments there has been an increase in forestry graduates going overseas since 1980.

#### THE IRISH FORESTRY PROFESSION AND TROPICAL FORESTRY

Considering that there is now a commitment by Ireland to aid tropical forestry, an effort should be made to harmonise and

maximise this country's involvement. The forestry profession, in both the private and public sectors, has a central role to play within the overall framework of Ireland's aid programme. To do this, interested institutions could come together within a recognised forum, where an interchange of ideas and experiences could take place. Discussion of this nature should eliminate duplication of activity. Furthermore, Ireland might develop a specialisation in an area in which Irish foresters could play a leading international role. This could be the foundation of a commercial consultancy enterprise. It must be remembered that this country has built up a considerable expertise over the last 80 years in plantation establishment and management and is one of the few countries in the world that has formed nearly its entire resource from an almost non-existent base.

To be more effective, forestry institutions should work with and through other institutions which are involved in overseas development. On the side of the state the main source of expertise is the Forest and Wildlife Service, while the body dealing with trade and the International Tropical Timber Organisation is the Department of Industry and Commerce. It is the brief of Foreign Affairs to orchestrate the state's overall involvement in development matters. On the side of the semi-private or private forestry sector there are the universities, timber growers and industrialists. Another dimension is the group of development agencies like the Agency for Personal Service Overseas (APSO), Gorta, Concern and others who have first hand experience in the tropics. Working through these organisations is not as difficult as this list might imply, because there already exists a certain level of mutual dependency. In order to be efficient in the international field it is advisable to forge links with major international initiatives, principally the International Tropical Timber Organisation and the Tropical Forestry Action Plan. The latter, which is being co-ordinated through FAO, is a plan rather than a new organisation and aims to make an impact to de-accelerate tropical deforestation. Ireland could contribute to the success of these undertakings and considering its involvement as a tropical importer — has a responsibility to do so.

Note: IR£1=US\$1.35.

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