

Madagascar's rosewood stocks – which way to go?

Derek Schuurman
Ndranto Razakamanarina
Sonja Hassold
Luke V. Zahner

Correspondence:
Journal Madagascar Conservation & Development
Anthropological Institute and Museum
University of Zurich
Winterthurerstrasse 190, 8057 Zurich, Switzerland
E-mail: info@journalmcd.net

For centuries, people around the globe have admired Rosewood. Malagasy rosewoods (*Dalbergia spp.*) are especially valued for their qualities. In recent years, illegal sourcing of rosewood escalated to unprecedented levels: this coincided with the political fallout from 2009-2013. The wood has been – and is – sourced mainly from protected areas in eastern Madagascar. Before being exported, timber is stockpiled, mostly in well-concealed localities. Despite an international ban on export and trading, the timber has been – and continues to – leave Madagascar. The species targeted are CITES listed, which means that trading them is forbidden. Most of the wood has been shipped to China, where demand for it is enormous. In 2011, stocks were estimated to be in excess of 500,000 tons. In 2013, the international community, spearheaded by the SADC were to prepare new presidential elections which were expected to put an end to the political and economic crisis of what is an increasingly beleaguered nation. In the same period, the World Bank implemented a project aimed at finding a solution of how to deal with the controversial rosewood stocks. At time of writing, this remains a topic of debate. Experts in a previous MCD interview suggested either to destroy the stocks in order to avoid further illegal sourcing of timber from protected areas, or to establish a timber bank of sorts. All agreed that selling the wood would be a double-edged sword: while it brings much-needed revenues to the empty coffers of the government, it may fuel and further increase demand for Rosewood. A noticeable and lengthy silence followed, with virtually no coverage in the national and international media. The World Bank project (#PO93271) comes to an end in December 2015: “all illegal precious woods stockpiles seized by Government have been audited and secured”.

The journal MCD is asking the 2011 questions – four years later, and would like to give voice to some of the experts and practitioners involved in this rosewood crisis.

DEREK SCHUURMAN, ENGLAND

What do you think should the government do with its stockpiled rosewood, and why?

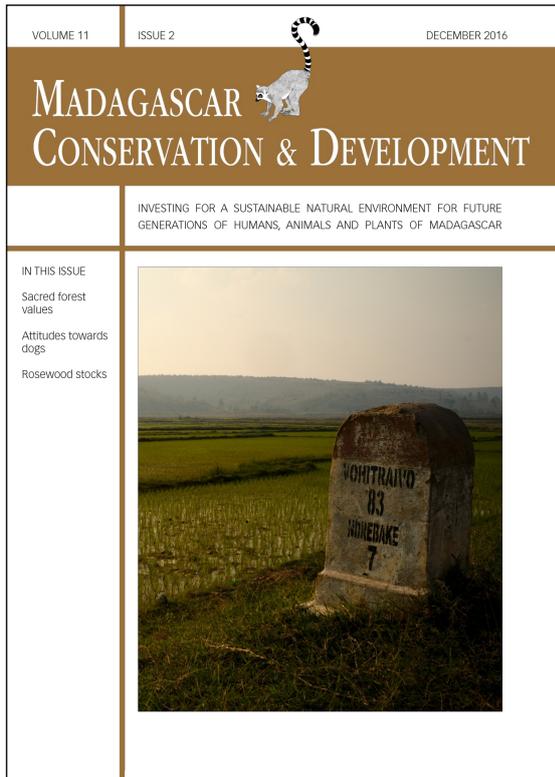
In an ideal world, I would advocate for the destruction of existing timber stocks. This would send a strong signal out to all parties involved in the supply and demand sides of the illegal trade in these hardwoods: as it has been established that the target species have been extirpated from outside of areas designated as protected, it follows that transportation and trade of such timber is illegal. However, it isn't so easy or straightforward. Firstly, nobody knows how much felled rosewood still remains concealed or unaccounted for. The country has a particularly difficult geography and a frail infrastructure. And it is one where corruption is rife. The criminal networks involved are backed by China and involve a network of Malagasy accomplices in all echelons of government. Madagascar would not want to upset its relations with China. Taking these factors into account, the alternative solution is the establishment of a 'wood bank', as has been discussed in the past. Once again however, such a process would more likely than not, be complicated and hindered by aforementioned variables, notably corruption.

Can the illegal logging and traffic of precious wood in Madagascar be stopped, and how?

There has to be political will on the part of the Malagasy government and also, cooperation on the part of the Chinese government. Without agreement from both sides, illegal trading of Malagasy rosewoods will not stop until the last trees have been felled. Given that the moratorium banning sourcing, transporting and trading of these timbers was declared in 2010 and that subsequently, these activities have been continuing unabated, the sensible approach would be for dialogue to be established with China, in hopes of having a ban declared on importing these timbers. If that is achievable, the rest will follow. (I do not see it working the other way around).

Please give in three key words, how you would improve this situation.

Transparency | foresight | negotiation



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Madagascar Conservation & Development
 Institute and Museum of Anthropology
 University of Zurich
 Winterthurerstrasse 190
 CH-8057 Zurich
 Switzerland

io@i

Indian Ocean e-Ink
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www.ioeink.com

 MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG)
 Madagascar Research and Conservation Program
 BP 3391
 Antananarivo, 101, Madagascar

NDRANTO RAZAKAMANARINA, ALLIANCE VOAHARY GASY, MADAGASCAR

Selon vous, que devrait faire le Gouvernement avec le bois de rose stocké, et pourquoi ?

Le gouvernement devrait assurer le transport des stocks de bois 'transportables' dans trois (maximum) lieux de stockage hautement sécurisés jusqu'à une date déterminée, et brûler les bois non transportables jusqu'à cette date limite devant le public. Il faudra conserver ces bois 'stockables' dans ces trois lieux de stockage hautement sécurisés jusqu'à l'obtention des autorisations de quota de vente par la CITES. Entre temps, il faudra autoriser les associations légales de sculpteurs de Madagascar à valoriser et bénéficier d'une partie déterminée des stocks. Il faudra mettre le stock restant en vente aux enchères publiques internationales tout en filtrant l'écoulement par rapport aux réseaux mafieux déjà identifiés (éviter la Chine?). Les fonds ainsi acquis devront servir au renforcement de la gouvernance du secteur (primes aux témoins, dénonciateurs, gardiens séquestres et agents de répression) et au développement durable des zones de prélèvement. Il va de soi que toutes ces mesures seront accompagnées d'un système sécurisant pour une haute protection de témoins assortie d'une prime de témoignage substantielle.

La coupe illégale et le trafic de bois précieux à Madagascar peuvent-ils être arrêtés et comment ?

La passivité ou l'inaction de l'État et des bailleurs de fonds qui continuent de fournir des financements tient de la complaisance, voire de la complicité face à l'ampleur et à l'impunité des trafics (Figure 1). Pour arrêter la coupe illégale, il faut inciter 'par tous les moyens imaginables' le Président de la République à s'engager personnellement et visiblement dans l'assainissement immédiat du trafic par trois indicateurs visibles : (i) Sanction à l'encontre de deux ou trois vrais barons récidivistes de la mafia ainsi que du personnel administratif inculpé et cela de manière exemplaire ; (ii) Engagement de la lutte contre la corruption et suivi transparent et public dans les trois secteurs de gouvernance hautement affectés, à savoir la justice, les forces armées et les collectivités décentralisées ; (iii) Développement concerté et mise en œuvre inclusive d'une vision sur 50 ans pour la gestion durable des ressources naturelles de Madagascar (bois précieux, mines et ressources halieutiques).

En trois mots clefs, comment pourriez-vous améliorer la situation.

Déstockage | sanction | vision

Pour assurer conjointement une décentralisation du pouvoir et des moyens ainsi que la mise en œuvre rapide du programme de développement du pays en incluant la valorisation holistique du grand potentiel hydroélectrique qui permettra la création d'emplois, l'indépendance énergétique et l'assainissement de l'énergie bois.

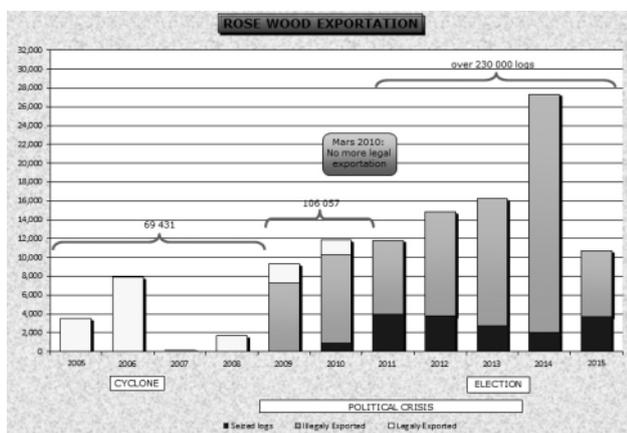


Figure 1. Exportations légales, illégales et saisies entre 2005 et 2015 (AVG et Fanamby).

SONJA HASSOLD, INSTITUTE OF INTEGRATIVE BIOLOGY,
ETH ZURICH, SWITZERLAND

What do you think should the government do with its stockpiled rosewood, and why?

Fact is that the rosewood stockpiles have been illegally logged, so whatever is decided, needs to account for that. I personally see a chance at this stage to develop a concept for the sustainable future use of Malagasy rosewood. Only with such a concept at hand we may decide what to do with the stockpiled rosewood. To develop such a concept we should decide how the future use, control, management and organization of Malagasy timber trade should look like. Precious timbers of Madagascar (rosewoods are by far not the only ones) can generate a valuable and sustainable income when managed and organised carefully. As a renewable resource I think these timbers may have great potential to play an important role in the future and are worth developing a long-term strategy for sustainable use that could reduce the pressure on protected forests. The genetic resources (e.g. seeds from different individuals of the same species and from different species) that are necessary to initiate such a project are still available to start with propagation of the economic interesting species but we need to start now, as with each loss of an adult tree the potential for collecting suitable seeds for cultivation is diminishing. Unfortunately in the case of Malagasy rosewoods (genus *Dalbergia*) we still do not know which species (botanically speaking) are illegally logged and traded and how severely they are therefore threatened. In order to identify the species that are most threatened through logging and to decide where to focus conservation efforts, we should analyse wood samples from the stockpiles with genetic methods, chemical component analysis, isotopes or wood anatomy. The scientific community therefore urgently needs access to samples from the stockpiles for identification purposes. With that in mind I personally think that the stockpiles should be kept safely for now and illegally harvested logs should continue to be seized, recorded and safely stored. The possibility of selling these stockpiles should only be discussed again once a detailed concept for the future sustainable use of Malagasy timber has been developed and agreed on. If then a decision is made to sell the stockpiles I would advice not to sell them all at once but in smaller portions so that the money can directly be invested in the different phases (see answer below) of the developed concept to initiate a visionary and sustainable long-term use of Malagasy rosewood.

Can the illegal logging and traffic of precious wood in Madagascar be stopped, and how?

I personally think that we should aim for a change of direction in the timber trade towards legal management and sustainability to generate money for future sustainable projects. For such a large-scale change to happen I think commitment and will are the most important drivers to successfully change this timber trade into a direction of sustainability. Having a clear step-by-step concept and strategy available to make the timber trade more sustainable might help to increase commitment and will. To develop and initiate such a sustainable concept for timber trade should in my opinion include discussions about how to control and ensure legality of timber in trade (e.g. improving the tagging system or using genetics and chemical component analysis), timber certification (e.g. based on genetics or forest concessions). It should

also address questions about the best cultivation model, what is a suitable place to start in terms of environment, management and infrastructure, what are the best growth conditions and what infrastructure is needed. It is critical to carefully consider who develops a business and management plan for such a project, who could manage such a project, how to involve the local communities and which stakeholders should be involved in order to achieve a broadly accepted and sustainable agreement that includes not only conservation aspects but also the welfare of the local communities. The species of interest may be slow growing and therefore a project with different phases might be required. This could be achieved with mixed cultures as shown in projects in India that combine cultivation of timber species with fruit trees and coffee plants where fruits and coffee generate income within a few years. To establish a long-term project I think it is important to also support the education and training of involved people, as well as involve scientists to improve molecular identification systems and cultivation methods. I think with commitment, will and visionary thinking towards sustainability it is possible to stop illegal logging with careful planning, implementation and involvement of local communities.

Please give in three key words, how you would improve this situation.

Develop a concept for sustainable use of Malagasy rosewood
Accessibility of stockpile samples for scientific analysis and development of identification tools for precious timbers
Cultivation of important timber species

LUKE V. ZAHNER

What do you think should the government do with its stockpiled rosewood, and why?

This is for the Malagasy government to determine in concert with international partners based on its obligations under CITES. One thing that is of concern to many, though, is the widespread belief that current stockpiles are being used to “launder” new wood. In other words, the old stockpiles are being switched out with newly logged wood, with the old logs being illegally smuggled out of the country. Thus the ongoing process of inventorying all of the stockpiles is a particularly critical step.

Can the illegal logging and traffic of precious wood in Madagascar be stopped, and how?

It takes everyone to come together to address this issue. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Shannon Smith told the press during her recent visit to Madagascar, it is both the supply and the demand sides of the equation that require action. On the demand side, receiving countries need to do more to interdict illegal wood coming into their countries and enforce the law against those smuggling it.

On the supply side, it takes a concerted effort at all levels. First and foremost, there must be clear political will to stomp it out once and for all. This includes prosecuting traffickers (no matter who they are or what their political or societal status is), and ensuring that rule of law is enforced throughout the country. Also, the independence of the judiciary must be protected, and insulated from external pressure. And environmental activists who speak out against these crimes should be protected, not prosecuted under stringent, though inconsistently applied, defamation laws that have a muzzling effect on civil society.

Lastly, the local communities have to participate too – recognizing that their livelihoods, and the livelihoods of future generations, are being jeopardized by deforestation and other illegal acts. As U.S. Ambassador Yamate said recently in Sambava (the epicenter of the illegal rosewood trade): “Floods become more extreme, storms worse, droughts more prolonged, as the forests disappear. This threatens everyone.”

Please give in three key words, how you would improve this situation.

Community engagement | law enforcement | civic education