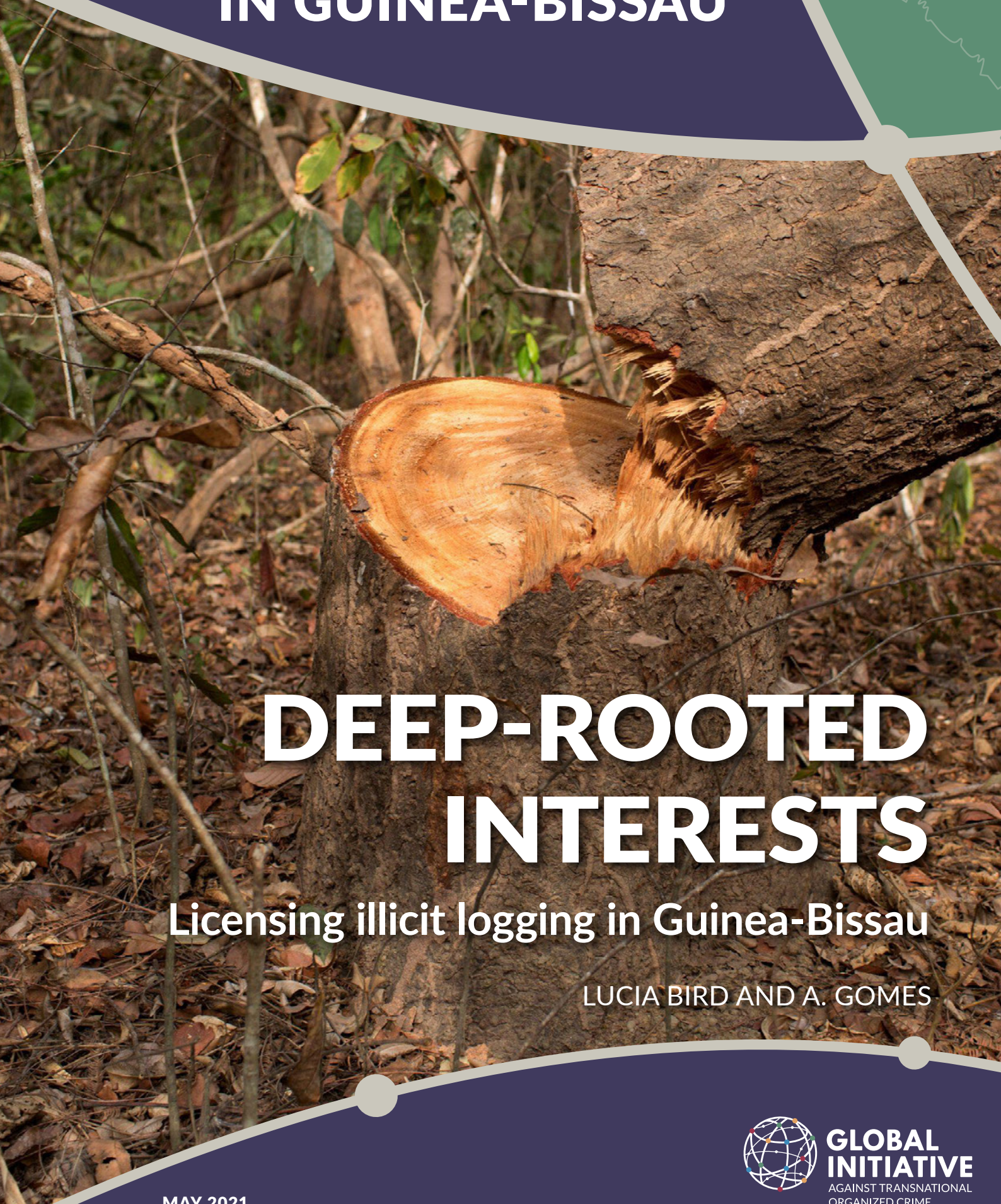


ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN GUINEA-BISSAU



DEEP-ROOTED INTERESTS

Licensing illicit logging in Guinea-Bissau

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**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

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Mural in Bissau depicting the regions and key economic sectors of Guinea-Bissau, March 2021. © GI-TOC

Introduction

The widespread devastation of Guinea-Bissau's forests – a process coordinated by the military – was curtailed in April 2015 by the imposition of a five-year moratorium on logging exports. Although this ban expired in March 2020, prevailing legal opinion in Bissau is that the moratorium requires formal lifting before exports of timber become legal again.¹ In October 2020, the current government drafted a decree to lift the ban – a move that catalyzed a surge in illicit logging activity, which had already increased after the government came to power at the start of 2020.² At the time of writing, the decree was awaiting signature by President Umaro Sissoco Embaló in order to come into force.

Drivers for lifting the moratorium may be linked to the powerful interests at play in the sector, both within Guinea-Bissau's elite and those of the Chinese business community, which have long-standing links to the logging business in the country. These interests, and particularly those of Prime Minister Nuno Gomes Nabiam, were highlighted by a significant seizure of illicit logs by the Judicial Police in November 2020, explored further below.

Advocates of lifting the ban suggest the sector can be better regulated if rendered legal, and support the imposition of additional conditions set out in the government's decree, including the requirement for companies engaging in logging activities to prepare and later implement a reforestation plan.³ One experienced consultant with long-standing experience working on environmental issues in Guinea-Bissau suggested that the lifting of the ban is immaterial, asking: 'Who cares about the moratorium? They keep on cutting trees with or without it, whether it is valid or not.'⁴

In contrast, community members in regions heavily affected by logging were consistent in noting that the moratorium, though imperfectly enforced, had decreased the pace of logging activities and has had a broadly positive impact.⁵ Civil society organizations working to enhance awareness of the impacts of illicit logging and to preserve Guinea-Bissau's natural resources consulted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) agreed with this assessment.⁶

These stakeholders, together with forestry officials and conservationists, predict that the lifting of the moratorium would usher in a new phase in the logging sector, one characterized by a renewed escalation in illicit felling, with widespread consequences for Guinea-Bissau's natural resources.⁷ Abilio Rachid Said, head of programmes at Guinea-Bissau's Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas, echoed the fears of many in stating: 'If this decree were to pass, we would revert to what happened prior to 2014.'⁸

Arguments against lifting the moratorium cite concerns that the legalization of certain timber exports would facilitate the export of illicitly felled wood (such as rosewood species listed by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) disguised among licit shipments, triggering a surge in illegal logging. The expected lifting of the moratorium has therefore sparked significant concern among officials, civil society organizations and community members alike.

For most Bissau-Guineans, it is arguably illicit logging, and not the cocaine trade, that is of the greatest concern, as it is perceived to have a more direct impact both on the environment and on everyday life outside Bissau. In order to gain insight from these communities outside the capital, in 2020 and 2021 the Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Guinea-Bissau coordinated community dialogues to discuss criminal markets in three regions heavily affected by illicit logging: Bafatá, Gabu and Cacheu. Although logging occurs throughout the forested regions of Guinea-Bissau, it is concentrated in regions north of Bissau, including the sites of the dialogues. The contributions and inputs of community members, voiced both within these dialogues and in parallel engagements, are central to the analysis in this bulletin.

This bulletin draws on extensive qualitative interviews with state and non-state actors conducted by the GI-TOC to outline the evolution of the country's illicit logging sector and to explore the entrenched interests underpinning its recent resurgence.

Evolution of the illicit logging sector

The logging industry in Guinea-Bissau experienced material expansion, and reached an unprecedented scale, during the 24-month period of military junta rule between 2012 and 2014, led by Antonio Indjai. This expansion was almost entirely fuelled by illicit felling: in 2013 Chatham House estimated that 80% of the logging in Guinea-Bissau was illicit.

The surge in illicit logging was attributable to the increased reliance of the military on profits from the illicit logging industry as other revenue streams dried up. The 2013 collapse in cashew nut prices, Guinea-Bissau's main export crop,⁹ was compounded by the temporary curtailment of the cocaine economy by the 2013 US Drug Enforcement Administration sting operation, which spooked actors involved in the illicit drug trade.



Rosewood, shown here as logs felled in the Oio region in northern Guinea-Bissau, is a species listed by CITES. © Joe Penney/Alamy

International sanctions imposed on the country's leadership, including Indjai, made external aid unavailable. The military, starved of funds, unofficially awarded logging concessions to officers in lieu of pay. In the words of Ude Fati, head of NGO Voz di Paz, during this period 'wood and other natural resources were used ... to support the state apparatus and the people in power'.¹⁰

A Gambian logger who worked in Bissau from 2012 to 2014 recounted that Indjai 'was controlling everything in the timber affair', deploying soldiers everywhere and giving out permits. While this account is anecdotal, it illustrates the extent to which the game changed as the military came to power, and points to the direct involvement of Indjai in the expansion of the logging industry.

The expansion was supercharged by the introduction of Chinese interests focused on natural-resource extraction in Guinea-Bissau and across the continent more widely.¹¹ Chinese companies and entrepreneurs inserted themselves into various stages of the logging supply chain across the continent, buying up concessions, bribing political and public officials and offering predatory loans to different parts of the informal industry.¹² The military proved eager partners: according to an Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) report, timber exports from Guinea-Bissau to China reached 98 000 tonnes in 2014, the equivalent of about 255 000 trees.¹³

The 2012–2014 period of unfettered logging ended with the return of civilian government, which imposed

a moratorium on timber exports.¹⁴ After his period in power came to a close, Indjai, who features on international sanctions lists for involvement in cocaine trafficking, temporarily faded from Bissau's political scene.

Indjai became visible in politics once again in the run-up to the December 2019 presidential elections, and played a key role in rallying support among the Balanta military hierarchy (which broadly votes in a unified manner) for Embaló. Indjai's apparent return to prominence with the change of administration in February 2020 was further signalled by his appearance alongside the new president in press photographs taken on the day of Prime Minister Nabiam's inauguration, two days after President Embaló's own.¹⁵

Following the election, rumours circled in Bissau that Indjai's support for President Embaló would be rewarded by his reappointment as chief of the armed forces. Although this had not yet occurred at the time of writing, and consequently Indjai remains officially powerless, he continues to wield significant influence in Bissau.

The key stakeholders with interests in the logging sector highlighted above – namely certain members of the political and military elite, and elements of the Chinese private sector – have remained more or less the same since the inception of Guinea-Bissau's illicit logging industry, one that has played an important role as a source of financing for the elite echelons of the state.

A patchy pause?

Illicit logging activities continued, albeit to a lesser degree, throughout the moratorium on exports, enabled in part by patchy and politically motivated enforcement. While the export of logs was banned, logging itself continued to be permissible. A small number of licence holders were originally permitted to continue felling,¹⁶ and 'licensed' activities have ballooned in subsequent years as the issue of fresh licences is poorly controlled. In Bafatá, community members reported that if individuals cutting trees were confronted, they typically showed documents issued by the Environment and Nature Protection Brigade (BPNA) authorizing their activities.¹⁷

A local government representative of São Domingos, an area in the Cacheu region in the north of the country,

commented: 'There are no adequate mechanisms for the control of licences that forestry authorities give, either for exploration, as well as for exportation of forest goods. ... The licence ... has no limitations on the type of wood, quantity and time limit, and lack[s] a legal foundation. It is used by many people, repeatedly, and becomes a universal and unlimited licence.'¹⁸

A consultant with long-standing experience in environmental issues in Guinea-Bissau highlighted the fragmented institutional approach to forest protection as a key weakness. The overlapping mandates of numerous state bodies tasked with regulating the country's forests facilitates the evasion of responsibility by each.¹⁹ Although an Inter-Ministerial Commission on Timber



The port of Bissau. The facility has been reportedly used to export illicit, processed timber to China.

© Issouf Sanogo/AFP via Getty Images

Management has been established, whose goals include clarifying mandates, progress has lagged.

A number of mechanisms for circumventing the moratorium further undermined its impact. One such mechanism was the processing of the raw products in Bissau, enabling export in the form of wooden planks, slats or other goods. According to Ude Fati, China – the key export market – accepts these products because ‘they have different designations and shapes’, and are therefore deemed to fall outside the export ban.²⁰ In Fati’s words, ‘They say “we are exporting laths, we are exporting boards”, they no longer say wood, it is the way they have found of circumventing the law. They have found a market for this: China, which says, “we do not buy wood but slats, planks”’.²¹

Although the wood factory in Bissau closed abruptly following the moratorium, the closure proved only temporary. According to Fati, by 2016 it had reopened, having been transformed into a factory that processed raw timber into wooden goods for export. Fati said that capacity for wood processing currently exceeds pre-moratorium levels.²²

The collusion of elements of the community in forested regions has also facilitated ongoing logging activities. In community dialogues in Bafatá, Gabú and Cacheu,

community members were consistent in pointing to collusion of community leaders or chiefs with upstream actors in the illicit logging industry as a key driver of persistent felling activities.²³ In the Bafatá region, community members told of waking up in the night to the sound of the chainsaws as trees were felled without their consent and, crucially, without any benefit of the logging accruing to them.²⁴

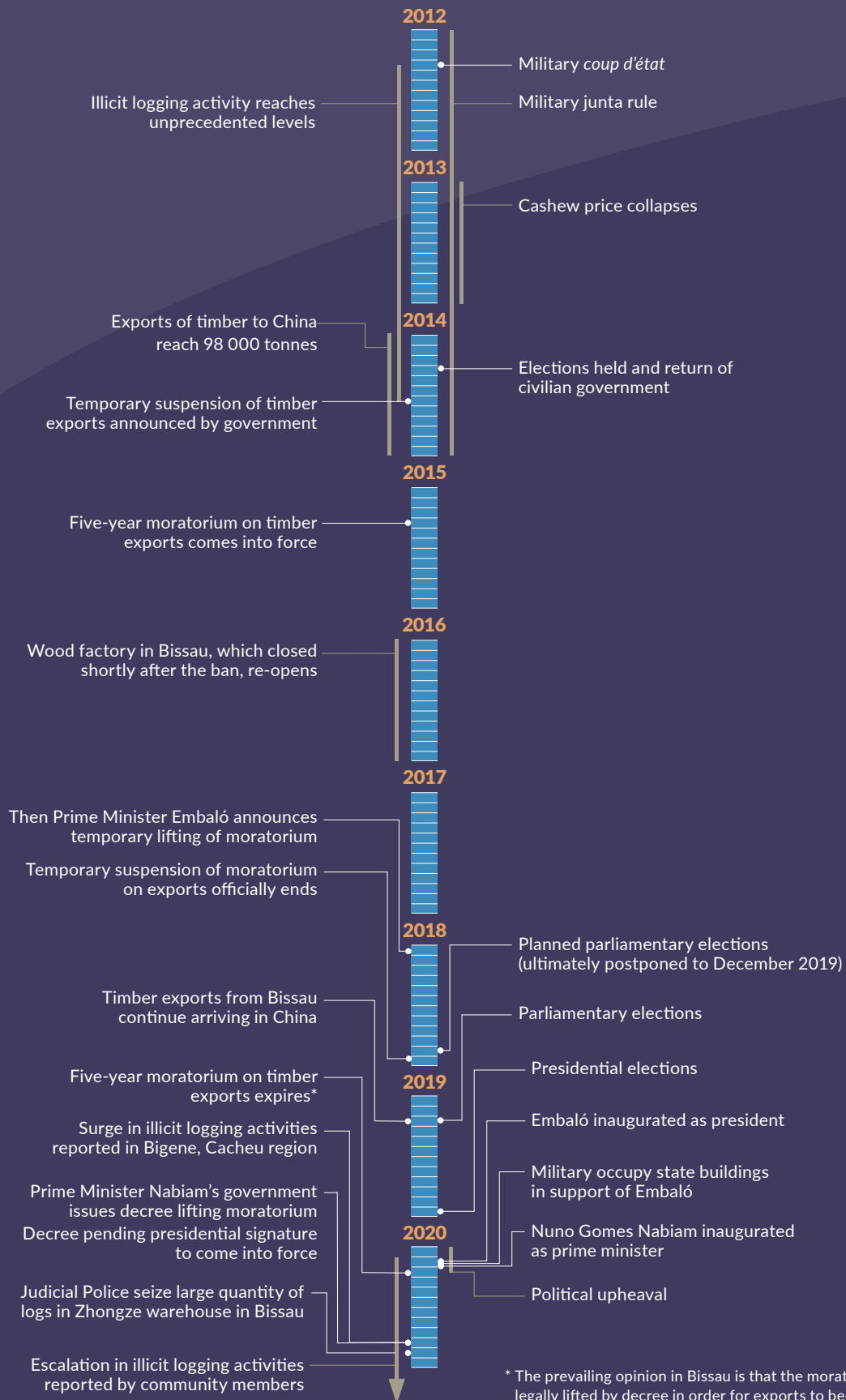
The role played by many community leaders as direct participants in, or indirect facilitators of, illicit logging has damaged trust between leaders and their communities. Some leaders have flagrantly displayed wealth through the purchase of cars (including flashy four-wheel drives and jeeps) and the renovation of homes, both of which are widely perceived by community members to have been financed through the illicit logging industry.

This loss of trust is particularly damaging, as the traditional chiefs are perceived as the key conduits of justice among these communities. The breakdown in the relationship between community leaders and the communities they are supposed to protect therefore presents a further obstacle to community members’ access to justice, and leaves many with no mechanism for raising grievances regarding the destruction of trees on their land.

KEY EVENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF GUINEA-BISSAU'S ILLICIT LOGGING SECTOR

ILLICIT LOGGING SECTOR

POLITICAL CONTEXT



* The prevailing opinion in Bissau is that the moratorium needs to be legally lifted by decree in order for exports to become legal once more.

State complicity in the illicit logging market

Although community leaders were identified as playing an important role in illicit logging, community members and civil society organizations alike repeatedly identified high-level state interests as the greatest structural enabler of the illicit logging industry.²⁵

In Gabú, Bafatá and Cacheu, community members pointed to the direct role of BPNA officials in illicit logging throughout the moratorium.²⁶ In Gabú, Chinese nationals were reported to be prominent in felling trees, particularly around Boé and Cansisse, villages at the edges of Dulombi-Boe national parks 1 and 2, respectively. Community members reported that BPNA officials visibly protected these activities, acting as guards and transporting the wood to Bissau.²⁷

BPNA officials have also been implicated in felling trees directly, reportedly cutting green wood under the pretext that they are gathering dead wood (a practice permitted under the moratorium). This green wood is mixed into the shipments of dead wood transported to Bissau for sale.²⁸ In Cacheu, and particularly in the Bula area, where logging is rife, community members have reported that they are unable to stop logging activities, in part because those felling the trees are armed.

Regional government figures in areas heavily affected by logging have similarly concluded that high-level state interests underpin logging activities. Logging activities in the Bigene sector, which is part of the Cacheu region and borders the volatile Casamance region in southern Senegal, experienced a sharp resurgence in October 2020, weeks after the government published the draft decree indicating a pending lifting of the ban.²⁹ On 26 October, the Vice Administrator of Bigene stated in an official note that 'some public entities [are suspicious] because it is not possible to contemplate or accept that the felling of trees has been carried out near Bigene since March 2019 without the knowledge of the administrator, or the forest guard and our National Guard'.³⁰

In February 2021, community members said on local radio that this surge in logging was contributing to instability in the region, which was flaring as Senegalese military and separatist rebels once again engaged in open conflict. Community representatives expressed concern that logging activities would trigger a cross-border 'armed incident',³¹ but forestry authorities in Bigene publicly stated that they could not intervene due to the complicity of higher-level officials in the business.³²



Offices of the Brigada de Proteção da Natureza e do Ambiente (BPNA), Environment and Nature Protection Brigade, in the Autonomous Sector of Bissau. © GI-TOC

LOGGING AND INSTABILITY: THE ROLE OF THE GAMBIA

The Gambia has long played a prominent role in exporting timber illicitly felled in Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance region in southern Senegal. Yahya Jammeh, former dictator of the Gambia, is widely believed to have been personally involved in illicitly importing timber from both neighbours, dispatching close allies to Bissau to handle his timber portfolio in the country.³³ Aziz Goudiaby, Jammeh's man in Bissau during then president João Bernardo Vieira's second term between 2005 and 2009, was a shadowy character who doubled as a fundraiser for a faction of the Casamance rebels, who also enjoyed Jammeh's support.³⁴

Parastatal companies set up by Jammeh to coordinate his illicit logging activities imported timber worth an estimated US\$356 million from Casamance and Guinea-Bissau during Jammeh's tenure.³⁵ Yet timber was not the only commodity in their portfolio: under full protection of the Gambian state colours, the companies transported drugs (including cannabis and cocaine), arms and timber between Bissau, Casamance and the Gambia using a fleet of trucks, tractors and boats.³⁶

Jammeh's involvement in the illicit logging sector has had long-standing impacts on the stability of the region. Jammeh's companies reportedly funnelled funds to the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), the insurgent independence movement in the Casamance, to buy their complicity in moving logs from the forests in Casamance and northern Guinea-Bissau.³⁷ They also funded military and civilian political leaders in Bissau close to Jammeh, undermining democratic processes.

The Gambia's change in administration in 2017 appears to have had little impact on the illicit logging industry. The import, export and transportation of timber was suspended in February 2017, within a month of President Adama Barrow coming to power.³⁸ However, according to a July 2020 BBC investigation, the Gambia had exported over 300 000 tonnes of West African rosewood to China since Barrow's inauguration,³⁹ despite the fact that the felling of rosewood, prized by Chinese buyers, is prohibited under CITES.

The Gambia declared its own stocks of rosewood to be near extinction almost 10 years ago. The vast majority of Gambian exports are instead sourced from the Casamance region, with a smaller proportion believed to have been felled in northern Guinea-Bissau, including in border areas where some separatist rebels have bases.⁴⁰

Research by the EIA published in June 2020 found that high-level officials in Barrow's administration continued to facilitate illicit logging, undermining the export ban imposed by the president.⁴¹ EIA research concluded that illicit logging and trafficking between the Casamance region and the Gambia continued to be controlled by the MFDC, and provides the key source of funding for rebel activities.⁴²

Guinea-Bissau, the Gambia and southern Senegal are bound together in the 'Senegambia' conflict system, within which the volatile Casamance region is a key trigger.⁴³ The ongoing role of illicit logging in funding the rebels intricately ties illicit logging activities spanning Guinea-Bissau, Casamance and the Gambia to regional stability dynamics.

Felling democracy

As indicated by the regional authorities in Bigene, interests in the sector penetrate beyond the BPNA to the higher echelons of state, and illicit profits are widely recognized to feed into the financing of electoral campaigns. Illicit logging profits were particularly prominent in funding the 2014 elections, which brought to a close the period of junta rule and ushered in the moratorium on exports. In the months leading up to the elections, hundreds of containers laden with timber could be seen entering Bissau from the interior on a daily basis.⁴⁴

The current prime minister, Nabiam, who ran a notably well-funded though ultimately unsuccessful campaign, was identified by a number of stakeholders as one key beneficiary.⁴⁵ Pro-Nabiam advertising was plentiful, and vehicles packed with Nabiam's supporters circled Bissau in the final days of the campaign. Given the recognized practice of vote-buying, and of paying 'supporters' small sums to attend rallies, the voluble support was widely perceived to point to significant campaign expenditure.

Funds from illicit logging were reportedly funnelled into Nabiam's campaign by both Indjai, a close ally who had reaped significant profits from the trade, as well as Nabiam himself, who had widespread interests in the sector.⁴⁶ Nabiam is widely recognized to have continued drawing profits from the sector to date, as highlighted by the November 2020 seizure explored below.

Another key figure in the current administration is also reported to have sought to leverage profits from logging in electoral campaigning. In 2017, Embaló, prime minister at the time, abruptly implemented a partial lifting of the moratorium. According to the testimony of a confidential source, Embaló told ministers that he was 'exceptionally authorizing the export of 1 500 containers filled with logs', which had been under guard at Bissau's docks since 2015. This decision was announced publicly at the end of January 2018.⁴⁷ EIA investigations found that Chinese businessmen and the embassy in Bissau had pushed for the temporary lifting of the ban, driven primarily by the desire to meet Chinese demand for rosewood.⁴⁸

The timber was sold to China, Vietnam and India, with the exports raising US\$12.6 million in revenue for the state.⁴⁹ Interviews in the capital suggested that the

moratorium had been exceptionally lifted by the ruling party as a means to raise campaign funds and support for the parliamentary elections originally slated for November 2018, and later postponed to March 2019.⁵⁰

The temporary lifting of the export ban fuelled a surge in the felling of fresh wood, disguised among consignments of older stockpiled wood before export.⁵¹

The mixing of more valuable recently felled wood was so prevalent that the EIA labelled the lifting of the ban a 'laundering scheme' for freshly cut rosewood.⁵² Although the window for legal export closed in December 2018, Chinese customs statistics show wood arriving as late as March 2019. This is later than shipments leaving Bissau in December would have arrived, pointing to the extension in the window for exports.⁵³

New logs, old players: the November 2020 seizure

The continuing involvement of high-level state officials in illicit logging was underscored by the November 2020 Judicial Police seizure of a large quantity of wood of legally dubious origin, which once again shone the spotlight on Nabiam's business interests.

The November seizure was the culmination of a Judicial Police investigation triggered by allegations that the wood had been obtained and processed unlawfully. The warehouse in which the logs were seized was the property of the Zhongze Furniture-China Mobiliario wood factory in Bissau (hereafter termed 'Zhongze'), previously known as Stenaks. Zhongze is reportedly managed by Chinese nationals and owned by a consortium that features a Chinese businessman, Prime Minister Nabiam and Braima Camará (the coordinator of the MADEM G-15 party currently in power), and has a dubious legal status.⁵⁴

As of 27 October 2020, Zhongze was not listed on the register of wood factories kept by the Directorate of Forestry and Fauna within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (the 'Directorate').⁵⁵ And although the factory was reportedly operational in 2020, the national electricity and water utility company reported having no formal contract with Zhongze as of November 2020.⁵⁶ On 28 October 2020, the day after the Directorate informed the Judicial Police that



Trucks allegedly transporting logs to the Zhongze wood factory in Bissau, in which senior Bissau-Guinean government officials are reported to hold interests, February 2021. *Photos: A group of anonymous citizens that monitors national events*

Zhongze was not registered, a company called 'Zhong Ze Factory Bissau Moveis, SA' (translated as 'Zhong Ze Factory Bissau Furniture') was incorporated in Bissau. The site of the registered office, the Bra Industrial Zone of Bissau, is also the location of the Zhongze wood factory, and the warehouse in which the logs were seized. In the company incorporation documents, the registered shareholders are two Chinese nationals and Sete Camará, Braima Camará's brother.⁵⁷

Imports of equipment seemingly for use in the Zhongze factory, many of which require electricity to function, suggest that activities may be scaling up. A Bill of Lading seen by the GI-TOC dated September 2020 documents the import from Guangdong, China, into Bissau Port of three containers holding 914 pieces of equipment.⁵⁸ The documented consignee for the shipment is the Malaika Group, a company with interests in the hospitality sector, of which Braima Camará is a known shareholder.⁵⁹ The bill is marked for the attention of Vitor Gomes Nabiam, the brother of the prime minister.⁶⁰ The equipment, which clearly befits a wood factory rather than a hotel (the Malaika Group's more widely recognized sphere of business), includes infra-red woodworking sheets, woodcutting bandsaw machines and woodworking bandsaw blades.

The visit of the Judicial Police to the Zhongze warehouse on 7 November 2020 followed an unsuccessful trip in the previous month, when officers had been

instructed to leave on the basis of 'orders from above' without being able to inspect the premises.⁶¹ The November visit was reportedly supported by President Embaló, who had been out of the country during the October visit. Lusophone press reported that Nabiam's wife monitored the inspection of the Zhongze warehouse by the Judicial Police.⁶² In late December 2020, the Judicial Police, backed by the president, purportedly sought the Attorney General's support to question Nabiam, but there are no reports that such questioning occurred, suggesting that the investigation has stalled.⁶³

The president's backing of the Judicial Police seizure and subsequent investigation has widely been perceived as a product of increasing tensions between Embaló and Nabiam. Embaló is heavily dependent on his prime minister, due to Nabiam's strong links with the powerful Balanta hierarchy of the military. Nevertheless, the stability of Nabiam's position is unclear. Embaló has publicly stated that Nabiam occupies a 'non-negotiable' position in government, yet privately the president is reported to cite Nabiam's widely reported involvement in the illicit logging sector as a key driver for pending dismissal.⁶⁴ Tensions between the post-holders have spiralled since the November seizure, fuelling a growing rift between the president and the Balanta hierarchy in the military, which has in turn destabilized the president's position.⁶⁵



An area of heavy deforestation outside Bissau. © Rui Vale Sousa/Shutterstock

Conclusion

The unholy trinity of interests underpinning the illicit logging trade in Guinea-Bissau – with the politico-military elite, community leaders and Chinese business figures at each point of the triangle – has remained largely intact since 2012.

The empowerment of key figures with interests in the trade in the current establishment, most prominently Prime Minister Nabiam but also Antonio Indjai, coincides with a pending change in approach to the sector, which threatens to facilitate an uptick in the ongoing pillage of the country's forests.

Chinese interests have remained highly visible in Guinea-Bissau. In a thinly veiled unofficial pact, Chinese aid to Guinea-Bissau, primarily in the form of infrastructure development projects, is repaid through favourable access to concessions to exploit the country's natural resources, most prominently fisheries and logging, with drastic consequences for the country's ecosystems.

The value of access to the logging industry is set to drastically increase following the lifting of the moratorium, which will enable increased volumes to be exported openly, and new concessions to be granted to Chinese operators. Precedent suggests that the increased volumes of timber being exported will include a high proportion of timber sourced illicitly.

Although the president has delayed in signing the decree, and consequently exports reportedly remain unlawful at the time of writing, stakeholders in Bissau report that the formal lifting of the moratorium is imminent. The country's forests have already suffered, as anticipation of a change in the government's approach has fuelled a surge in logging activities since the change of administration in February 2020.

The following measures are recommended.

Recommendations

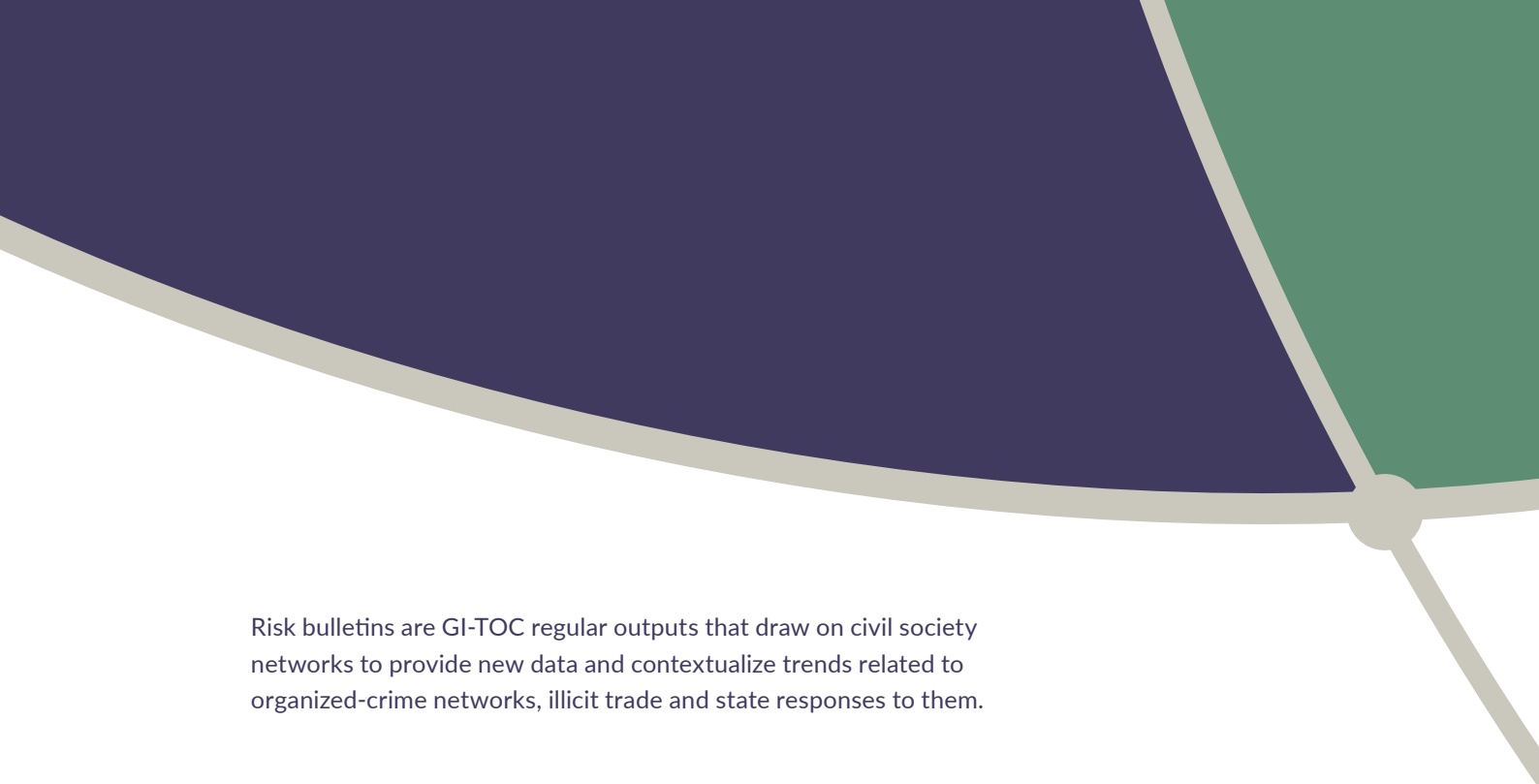
1. Support civil society advocating for the better protection of Guinea-Bissau's forests and resisting illicit logging activities. Fostering community dialogue and engagement surrounding the importance of the role of communities, including community leaders, in protecting the forests is an essential pillar of this.
2. Bolster the capacity and resources of the Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas, the national institution with the mandate to manage Guinea-Bissau's biodiversity and 'protected areas', which include a number of classified forests.⁶⁶ This should include advocating for the expansion of the body's mandate, to the extent enabled by additional resources, beyond 'classified' forests to encompass all forested areas in the country.
3. Support the Inter-Ministerial Technical Commission for Timber Management, which includes the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Finance and Interior together with the Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas, to better operate as a common platform for dialogue among the various institutions tasked with protecting Guinea-Bissau's forests. The commission, whose actions to date have been largely limited to a small number of meetings, should broaden its membership to include all relevant institutions, clarify mandates, clearly allocate responsibilities and take a more proactive approach going forward.
4. If the decree comes into force, support domestic and international civil society organizations in advocating for enforcement of the new regulatory regime's provisions regarding reforestation and protection of national resources. It is crucial to keep transparency and reporting on compliance with the new regulatory regime high on the government's agenda.

Notes

- 1 Telephone interviews with lawyer in Bissau, 24 March 2021. Encrypted message exchange with consultant with long-standing experience working on environmental issues in Bissau, 24 March 2021.
- 2 Acceleration in logging, and concerns that illicit felling would increase further if the moratorium was lifted, was reported across community dialogues coordinated by the Civil Society Observatory for Illicit Economies in Guinea-Bissau in 2020 and 2021 in Bafatá, Gabu, and Cacheu regions. Spikes in illicit logging in 2020 have also been reported in local radio and press, including: Rádio Sol Mansi investigation into dynamics in Bigene, 26 February 2021.
- 3 See comments of Abel da Silva, Minister of Agriculture, and Viriato Cassamá, Minister of Environment and Biodiversity, at a press conference held to respond to critics of the pending lifting of the ban on 19 October 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/pt/guiné-bissau/20201019-guiné-bissau-fim-da-moratória-sobre-abate-de-árvores>.
- 4 Encrypted message exchange with consultant with long-standing experience working on environmental issues in Bissau, 24 March 2021.
- 5 Views expressed at community dialogues coordinated by the Civil Society Observatory for Illicit Economies in Guinea-Bissau in 2020 and 2021 in Bafatá, Gabu and Cacheu regions. See also views of technocrats and independent observers cited in: Tuesday Reitano et. al., *Razing Africa: Combatting criminal consortia in the logging sector*, ENACT, July 2018, <https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/2018-09-20-research-paper-06-logging.pdf>.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid. See also public statements by forestry officials and conservationists reported in: Ricci Shyrock, *Fears for rosewood as Guinea-Bissau prepares to lift six-year logging ban*, 21 January 2021, Mongabay, <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/01/fears-for-rosewood-as-guinea-bissau-prepares-to-lift-six-year-logging-ban/>.
- 8 Quoted in: Beatriz Ramalho da Silva, *Guinea-Bissau's plan to lift logging ban sparks fears for forests*, 20 March 2021, Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/20/guinea-bissau-plan-to-lift-logging-ban-sparks-fears-for-forests>.
- 9 Prices for cashew nuts dropped to less than US\$0.40 per kilogram, according to an interview with a member of the industry, August 2019. According to the IMF, a fall in demand for cashew nuts in 2020 has once again damaged Guinea-Bissau's fiscal position. However, this time external aid has been more forthcoming, and on 25 January 2021 the IMF approved US\$20.47 million in emergency support to the country. Nevertheless, were demand to remain suppressed in the medium term, communities are likely to suffer and the state look elsewhere for additional revenue.
- 10 Interview, Bissau, December 2020, Ude Fati.
- 11 Chinese demand for high-value rosewood species had long been met by harvesting in Asia, but by 2010 Asian supplies were shrinking thanks to diminishing forests pillaged by rapacious logging, and countries started to ban the practice, prompting a shift towards Africa. Nellie Peyton, *Chinese logging takes heavy toll on farmers in Guinea-Bissau*, Reuters, 8 May 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bissau-environment-forests/chinese-logging-takes-heavy-toll-on-farmers-in-guinea-bissau-idUSKCN1SE190>; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), 17th Conference of the Parties (CoP17) Inf. 79: Analysis of the demand-driven trade in hongmu timber species: Impacts of unsustainability and illegality in source regions, 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties Johannesburg (South Africa), 24 September–5 October 2016, <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/InfDocs/E-CoP17-Inf-79.pdf>.
- 12 In particular, Chinese companies targeted the high-value species that were demanded in markets in Asia. Xiaoxue Weng et al., *The Africa–China timber trade: Diverse business models call for specialized policy responses*, CIFOR, March 2014, <https://www.cifor.org/library/4518/the-africa-china-timber-trade-diverse-business-models-call-for-specialized-policy-responses/>.
- 13 Environmental Investigation Agency, *Authorized plunder: the rosewood stockpile sale*, 2018, https://content.eia-global.org/posts/documents/000/000/802/original/EIA_US_GuineaBissau_report_0918_US_Format_FINAL_MEDRES.pdf?1547131805.
- 14 A symbolic act by the army high command was telling of how the atmosphere had changed, following an election that was noted for the extent of its active participation and civil society oversight. In May 2015, the army mobilized approximately 1 000 men to plant thousands of saplings across the country over a weekend, to atone for 'environmental crime (for which) the military took responsibility'. What started as a weekend activity spiralled into a full-fledged tree planting and environmental project executed by the Guinea-Bissau Ministry of Defence and the Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas (IBAP), the government (but operationally largely independent) body responsible for environmental affairs. The then country director of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) explained in an interview how he circulated military barracks in Guinea-Bissau armed with nothing but a laptop and short films showing the aftermath of the wanton log cutting which happened from 2011 to mid-2014 in order to recruit military officers to help with the replanting scheme. GI-TOC commissioned interviews in Bissau in December 2017.
- 15 Mark Shaw and A. Gomes, *Breaking the vicious cycle: Cocaine politics in Guinea-Bissau*, May 2020, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Guinea-Bissau_Policy-Brief_Final2.pdf.
- 16 Government seeks to crack down on illegal logging, Economist Intelligence Unit, 27 April 2015, <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=383113622&Country=Guinea-Bissau&topic=Economy&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=Policy+trends&u=1&pid=1065652490&oid=1065652490&uid=1>.
- 17 Statements by participants at community dialogue event coordinated by the Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Guinea Bissau, Ganadu, Bafatá region, 18 December 2020.
- 18 São Domingos sector administrator, speaking at the community dialogue event coordinated by the Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Guinea Bissau in Bula, Cacheu region, 26 February 2021.
- 19 These bodies include the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; the National Guard; the Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas; and the Judicial Police (in relation to organized crime connected to forests). Encrypted message exchange with consultant with long-standing experience working on environmental issues in Bissau, 24 March 2021.
- 20 Interview with Ude Fati, Bissau, December 2020.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid. Fati stated that SOCOTRAM (Sociedade para Comercialização e Transformação de Madeira), which exported to the whole subregion and the rest of the world, had only two turbines, while the new processing plant has nine.

- 23 In Muslim communities these leaders are imams. Community dialogue event coordinated by the Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Guinea Bissau, 18 December 2020, Guinea Bissau.
- 24 Community dialogue event coordinated by the Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Guinea Bissau, Ganadu, Bafatá region, 18 December 2020. Clandestine deforestation includes the destruction of a wide range of species, including the blood stick, cibes and palm varieties.
- 25 Statements by community members, representatives of civil society institutions and regional officials at community dialogue events coordinated by the Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Guinea Bissau in Gabu, Bafatá and Cacheu in 2020 and 2021.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Community dialogue event in Gabú, Guinea-Bissau, 12 December 2020. In addition to Chinese nationals, Gambians, Senegalese and Guineans were also reported to be involved in illicit logging activities in the region.
- 28 Community dialogue event in Gabú, Guinea-Bissau, 12 December 2020.
- 29 Ditadura e Consenso, *Populares Denunciam Nova Invasão Dos Madeireiros Clandestinos Nas Matas Do País*, 28 October 2020, <http://ditaduraconsenso.blogspot.com/2020/10/populares-denunciam-nova-invasao-dos.html>.
- 30 The note identifies two key players in the cutting activities, one named Augusto and another collaborator who typically goes to Senegal to purchase felled logs. The note concludes that in addition to these protagonists, state bodies are also suspicious: '*Mas também algumas entidades públicas, porque não é possível que essas operações sejam feitas próximo de Bigene desde o mês de março de 2019 e o administrador, o homem de floresta e a nossa Guarda Nacional não saibam do corte de madeiras, não é de contemplar nem aceitável.*' Note issued by Professor Agostinho Apa, Vice Administrator, Regional Government of Cacheu, department of Bigen/Ingore, 26 October 2020.
- 31 Rádio Sol Mansi investigation into dynamics in Bigene, 26 February 2021.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Interviews commissioned by the GI-TOC with senior officials at Interpol National Central Bureau Office, Gambia Police HQ, November 2017. An Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) investigation revealed that Jammeh and his associates may have extracted close to US\$1 billion in timber resources and the Gambia's public funds over the course of his rule. Khadija Sharife and Mark Anderson, *The great Gambia heist*, OCCRP, 27 March 2019, <https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/how-yahya-jammeh-stole-a-country>. In 2013 Jammeh appointed Abdu Jarju as ambassador to Guinea-Bissau allegedly with the brief to manage his illicit timber operations.
- 34 Goudaby was Jammeh's nephew and supported the faction of the rebel MFDC led by Salif Sadio. Sadio leads the Northern faction of the insurgents whose areas of operations run alongside the Gambian border. Sadio enjoyed warm ties with ex-president Jammeh, who reportedly furnished him with arms, ammunition, food and supplies.
- 35 Reportedly, government parastatals and the Central Bank of The Gambia were dumping millions of dollars into accounts of Jammeh's companies under the executive directive of Jammeh personally, and had free rein through Banjul Port.
- 36 Interviews commissioned by the GI-TOC with senior officials at Interpol National Central Bureau Office, Gambia Police HQ, November 2017.
- 37 These companies also imported palm oil from Guinea-Bissau. The MFDC maintained cadres in the Gambian village of Farato Jola Kunda and in Kanilai who acted as middlemen between the rebels and the timber dealers, collecting money from dealers in the Gambia.
- 38 The ban was temporarily lifted between December 2018 and May 2019. Environment Investigation Agency, *Cashing-in on Chaos: How traffickers, corrupt officials, and shipping lines in The Gambia have profited from Senegal's conflict timber*, June 2020, <https://content.eia-global.org/assets/2020/06/EIA-Cashing-In-On-Chaos-HiRes.pdf>.
- 39 Charlotte Attwood, *Rosewood smuggling in The Gambia: Shipping firm halts timber exports*, 8 July 2020, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53325743>.
- 40 MFDC has bases in the villages of Santhaba Manjack, Kassalol and Djirack inside Guinea-Bissau. See *Ataque de Bofa, L'Armée veut entrer en Guinée-Bissau pour...*, seneweb, 11 January 2018, https://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/attaque-de-bofa-l-rsquo-armee-veut-entre_n_235560.html; Environment Investigation Agency, *Cashing-in on Chaos: How traffickers, corrupt officials, and shipping lines in The Gambia have profited from Senegal's conflict timber*, June 2020, <https://content.eia-global.org/assets/2020/06/EIA-Cashing-In-On-Chaos-HiRes.pdf>.
- 41 Environment Investigation Agency, *Cashing-in on Chaos: How traffickers, corrupt officials, and shipping lines in The Gambia have profited from Senegal's conflict timber*, June 2020, <https://content.eia-global.org/assets/2020/06/EIA-Cashing-In-On-Chaos-HiRes.pdf>.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 This is only one of a number of sub-regional conflict systems in West Africa. See Alexandre Marc, Neelam Verjee and Stephen Mogaka, *The challenge of stability and security in West Africa*, World Bank Group, Agence Française de Développement, 2015, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/publication/the-challenge-of-stability-and-security-in-west-africa>.
- 44 Profits from illicit logging also fed into the 2005 elections. Africa Confidential, *Guinea-Bissau: The civilians may be back*, 15 April 2014, <https://www.africa-confidential.com/index.aspx?pageid=21&articleid=5580>.
- 45 Nabiam was certainly not the only reported beneficiary. Indeed, the Party for Social Renewal (PRS), which lost the elections to the PAIGC, was known to rely on profits from the illicit logging sector to function. Some perceived the imposition of the moratorium by the PAIGC to be principally motivated by a desire to remove this source of funding, further weakening the PRS. Interviews with Bissau-Guinean business managers, December 2017.
- 46 Interviews commissioned by the GI-TOC with Bissau business managers, December 2017.
- 47 Guinea Bissau to export stocks of seized, rare timber, Reuters, 23 January 2018, <https://news.trust.org/item/20180123150206-aeqcw/>.
- 48 Environment Investigation Agency, *Authorized plunder: the rosewood stockpile sale*, 2018, https://content.eia-global.org/posts/documents/000/000/802/original/EIA_US_Guinea-Bissau_report_0918_US_Format_FINAL_MEDRES.pdf?1547131805.
- 49 Guinea Bissau to export stocks of seized, rare timber, Reuters, 23 January 2018, <https://news.trust.org/item/20180123150206-aeqcw/>; Environment Investigation Agency, *Authorized plunder: the rosewood stockpile sale*, 2018, https://content.eia-global.org/posts/documents/000/000/802/original/EIA_US_Guinea-Bissau_report_0918_US_Format_FINAL_MEDRES.pdf?1547131805.

- 50 Interviews commissioned by the GI-TOC with Bissau business managers, December 2017.
- 51 The poor storage conditions for much of the stockpiled wood decreased its value.
- 52 Nellie Peyton, Chinese logging takes heavy toll on farmers in Guinea: Bissau, 8 May 2019, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bissau-environment-forests-idUSKCN1SE190>; Environment Investigation Agency, Authorized Plunder: Authorized plunder: the rosewood stockpile sale, 2018, https://content.eia-global.org/posts/documents/000/000/802/original/EIA_US_Guinea-Bissau_report_0918_US_Format_FINAL_MEDRES.pdf?1547131805.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 E-Global, Guiné-Bissau: *PJ terminou apreensão de madeiras de empresa supostamente de Nuno Nabiam*, 9 November 2020, <https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/guine-bissau/guine-bissau-pj-terminou-apreensao-de-madeiras-de-empresa-supostamente-de-nuno-nabiam/>. O Democrata, *Negócio de madeira: Primeiro-Ministro Nabian E Braima Camará Nos Radares Da Polícia Judiciária*, 30 December 2020, <https://www.odemocratagb.com/?p=27877>
- 55 Letter from Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 27 October 2020.
- 56 Letter from Electricidade e Águas de Guine-Bissau, 4 November 2020.
- 57 The Article of Association state that, although decisions can be taken by two of the three shareholders, this must always include Seta Camara. This enshrines significant power in the hands of Camara. Incorporation certificate and Articles of Association for Zhong Ze Factory Bissau Moveis, SA, dated 28 October 2020.
- 58 Bill of Lading for Ocean Transport or Multimodal Transport, stamped 15 September 2020, for import of 914 pieces of equipment into Bissau Port.
- 59 Including in the Malaika hotel in the centre of Bissau. The Malaika group may have been listed as the consignee because the Zhongze Furniture-China Mobiliario wood factory was not fully registered in Bissau, which could have caused problems in the import process.
- 60 The Bill is for the attention of 'Vetro Gomes Nabiam', but this is believed to be a typo.
- 61 Interviews, Bissau, December 2020.
- 62 E-Global, *Guine-Bissau: PJ terminou apreensão de madeiras de empresa supostamente de Nuno Nabiam*, 9 November 2020, <https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/guine-bissau/guine-bissau-pj-terminou-apreensao-de-madeiras-de-empresa-supostamente-de-nuno-nabiam/>.
- 63 Judicial Police investigations in December 2021 continued to identify Nuno Gomes Nabiam as a suspect, alongside a number of additional figures, including Botche Candé, Minister of Interior in the current administration.
- 64 Guiné-Bissau: *Umaro Sissoco Embaló segura Nuno Nabian como primeiro-ministro*, RFI, 7 October 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/pt/guine-bissau/20201007-guine-bissau-umaro-sissoco-embalo-segura-nuno-nabian-como-primeiro-ministro>.
- 65 In February 2021, the military reportedly sent a message to Biague N'Tam, Chief of the armed forces, that if Nabiam is dismissed, Embaló will 'accompany him'. E-Global, *Guiné-Bissau: Militares em prevenção devido a rumores conspiracionistas*, 8 February 2021, <https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/guine-bissau/guine-bissau-militares-em-prevencao-devido-a-rumores-conspiracionistas/>.
- 66 Reporting to the Minister in charge of the environment, the Institute has administrative, financial and patrimonial autonomy, and therefore has the capacity to develop policies and norms related to the conservation of biodiversity and Protected Areas (PAs). The objectives of the institute are: (i) to promote the safeguarding of ecosystems and biodiversity; (ii) to support the creation and management of PAs; (iii) to promote the rational and equitable use of natural resources. With a network of collaborators distributed between the headquarters in Bissau and the eight PAs, this institution develops its activities throughout the national territory, having as its field of action all areas of activity in the biodiversity and PA sector, which include natural or constituted reserves, parks and classified forests. These activities focus on strengthening the effective, collaborative and integrated management of ecosystems, based on a perspective of biodiversity conservation and support for sustainable development.



Risk bulletins are GI-TOC regular outputs that draw on civil society networks to provide new data and contextualize trends related to organized-crime networks, illicit trade and state responses to them.

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The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with 500 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

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