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UPROOTING CAMEROON'S ELITE TIMBER NETWORKS

MAY 2026

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Camvert	Cameroun Vert
CPDM	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement
EUTR	EU Timber Regulation
FMUs	Forest Management Units
Minfof	Ministry of Forests and Wildlife
SCIEB	Société camerounaise d'industrie et d'exploitation du bois
WWF	World Wildlife Fund



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forest cover loss hit a record high in Cameroon in 2023, as more than 200 000 hectares disappeared that year, equating to roughly one football pitch every two minutes.¹ This report investigates the principal perpetrators behind a network of politically connected companies that appear to be decimating Cameroon's forests. It examines the methods of these perpetrators and explores how corruption permeates and compromises every aspect of the country's forestry management process and timber supply chain, from the granting of permits to excess felling of trees and the export of logs.

Two logging companies and one agribusiness company, all linked to Aboubakar Al Fatih – a discreet businessman and senior member of the highest decision-making body in Cameroon's ruling party – have recently been granted large concessions in the country's forests in controversial circumstances.² Sextransbois and Société camerounaise d'industrie et d'exploitation du bois (SCIEB) are the logging companies, while Camvert is the agribusiness company. Civil society organizations and international environmental NGOs have claimed that these three companies obtained their permits without a public tender or the required process of consultation with local populations.³ Such consultations are a requirement under Cameroon's forestry law and are meant to be overseen by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife (Minfoc).⁴ In one case, regarding the granting of logging concessions to SCIEB and Sextransbois in the biodiverse-rich Ebo forest, Indigenous groups have initiated legal proceedings demanding that the two concessions be scrapped due to flaws in the consultation process.⁵ These allegations have been met with silence by the companies in question.

Civil society organizations allege that these timber companies, as well as an additional Al Fatih-linked logging company, Boisgam, have been harvesting wood beyond their permitted boundaries, likewise in violation of Cameroonian law.⁶ Despite this outcry, the network of companies continues to log unabated, exacerbating existing concerns that these entities are benefitting unduly from political favours.⁷

The GI-TOC's research into the network and its facilitators has found new evidence that supports these claims, while also revealing further corporate and interpersonal connections as well as alleged illegalities, including potential transfer pricing violations of the EU Timber Regulation.

The GI-TOC was able to confirm that Sextransbois, SCIEB and Boisgam are part of the same network of companies.⁸ Corporate registry documents for Sextransbois show that the company was registered in Sangmélima – the power base of President Paul Biya – and was initially owned by three in-laws

of his eldest son, Franck Biya.⁹ Formal ownership was then passed on to a half-brother of Al Fatih, Mahmoud Mourtada, who was only 20 years old at the time, raising the question of the beneficial ownership of the company.¹⁰ It is important to note that, while the GI-TOC did not find any evidence of direct interference by the president or his family in the awarding of any logging concessions, the connections that we describe in more detail below require closer scrutiny.

This is not the only instance of the companies' elite connections. Insiders at Minfof allege that Alamine Ousmane Mey, the country's economy minister, has granted political favours to Al Fatih and his network of companies.¹¹ Similarly, the president's office reportedly pressured Minfof to grant logging permits to Al Fatih's companies in Ebo forest.¹² Indigenous chiefs from Ebo, who oppose the granting of concessions to these companies, alleged Al Fatih tried to bribe them.¹³

Illegal logging in Cameroon is not only a local concern. Recent customs data obtained by the GI-TOC shows that SCIEB exported timber products to the EU, including Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Portugal.¹⁴ This means that EU importers are likely violating the EU Timber Regulation, which makes it illegal to place timber on the EU market that has been logged in violation of the laws of the country of origin.¹⁵ The data also shows that SCIEB may be engaged in 'transfer pricing' – evading tax on profits by selling timber products below market value to a sister company, registered offshore, which resells it to buyers in EU nations and other countries at the real market value. Transfer pricing in this way is illegal in Cameroon.¹⁶

Methodology

This report is based on primary research, including corporate documents and trade data, as well as interviews with a range of sources who possess in-depth knowledge of Cameroon's timber sector, including knowledge of Al Fatih's companies. The evidence for the findings are referenced in the body of the report.

The GI-TOC sought comment from the individuals and entities named in this report. Emails were sent to Alamine Ousmane Mey, Mahmoud Mourtada, Serge Mounier Baroux, Boiscam, Camvert, SCIEB, Sextransbois and Sudcam. Messages were sent to Aboubakar Al Fatih, Franck Biya, Koulsoumi Alhadji Boukar and United Development (HK) Co. Ltd. No reply or comment was received from these individuals or entities. In the cases of Christine Baroux, Koulsoumi Alhadji Boukar's younger brother and Rémy Ze Meka, no contact details could be found but any comment received will be published by the GI-TOC on its website if received.

Key points

- A network of companies, Sextransbois, SCIEB, Boiscam and Camvert, linked to politically connected businessman Aboubakar Al Fatih, continue to log despite being granted timber and agribusiness concessions in violation of Cameroonian law, civil society sources claim.
- An elite political network – including officials within government ministries and the president's office – appears to be providing support for timber exploitation and agribusiness that is decimating Cameroon's old-growth forest.
- Members of Cameroon's ruling elite appear to be treating tracts of forest as personal fiefdoms; natural resources that they can draw on at will. This report highlights evidence suggesting that several in-laws of Frank Biya, the eldest son of President Paul Biya, were the initial owners of

controversial timber company Sextransbois, ownership of which has since passed to Mahmoud Mourtada, a relative of Al Fatih.

- The apparent corruption and impunity at the highest level enables a broader ecosystem of corruption, characterized also by Minfof staff at each level getting away with taking bribes and blocking reform attempts. As a result, corruption and illegal activity are endemic at each stage of the timber supply chain, from the allocation of logging permits to the itemization of forest inventories and creation of management plans to the harvesting, transport and export of wood.
- Customs data indicates that SCIEB exported timber products to several EU importers, who may be violating the EU Timber Regulation. SCIEB may also be engaged in 'transfer pricing'.

DEFINING ILLEGAL LOGGING

Chatham House defines illegal logging as 'all illegal practices related to the harvesting, processing and trading of timber'. This definition, which has been adopted for the purposes of this study, extends beyond activities in forests themselves to include 'logging under an illegally acquired licence or in protected areas, exceeding permitted harvest quotas, processing logs without the necessary licences, tax evasion and exporting products without paying export duties'.¹⁷ ■



INTRODUCTION

Cameroon's tropical forests cover around 40% of the country, making it the second largest forested area in the Congo Basin.¹⁸ The Congo Basin is the world's largest forest carbon sink, absorbing more carbon dioxide than any other ecosystem, including the Amazon rainforest.¹⁹ Cameroon's forests are vital to the livelihoods of around 8 million rural people, providing essential resources such as food, medicine, fuel and construction materials.²⁰ These forests are especially important for Indigenous communities, whose well-being and cultural traditions are at risk due to deforestation and environmental degradation. In 2023, Cameroon experienced its highest-ever rate of forest cover loss. From 2001 to 2023, the country lost more than 2 million hectares of forest, marking a 6.5% decline in overall tree cover.²¹

Cameroon has a long history of commercial logging, with the forestry sector accounting for approximately 12% of the country's exports in 2021. The forestry value chain is the third-largest source of export revenue, following cocoa and hydrocarbons.²² Around 8 million of Cameroon's 22 million hectares of forest is designated for timber production. Approximately 50 large international or national companies and 40 medium-sized national companies carry out logging activities.²³ In 2019, logging permits were distributed predominantly between 121 large-scale logging concessions on Forest Management Units (FMUs) and 142 smaller-scale Sales of Standing Volumes ('*ventes de coupe*').²⁴

Cameroon has become a leading exporter of timber in the Congo Basin and across Africa.²⁵ At the same time, the scale of illegal logging appears extensive. For example, in 2013, Chatham House estimated that up to 65% of Cameroon's timber production was illegal.²⁶ More recent estimates, from 2019, suggest a small decrease, to 61% for the domestic market and 41% for exported timber.²⁷ The EU remains the main export destination for Cameroonian wood, receiving more than US\$180 million of the country's timber exports in 2021. China and Vietnam follow closely behind.²⁸

Corruption has long been known as a prevalent driver of illegal logging in Cameroon's forestry sector. The country is ranked 140th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, down slightly from 136th a decade ago.²⁹ Various studies have documented how bribery, nepotism and other corrupt practices are rife in nearly all economic sectors and branches of Cameroon's government.³⁰ The forestry sector is no exception.

Bribery of senior officials and civil servants by logging companies has long been endemic and central to the award of permits.³¹ This was confirmed in a 2013 study by the Center for International Forestry Research, which estimated that state officials collect more than €46 million in bribes each year from illegal logging.³² A 2021 report by the National Agency for Financial Investigation estimated that illegal logging costs the state approximately 33 billion Central African francs (around US\$59 million)³³ each year.³⁴



The scale of illegal logging in Cameroon's rainforest has been extensive and forest cover loss reached a record in 2023. © Michael Gottschalk/Photothek via Getty Images

However, the true extent of lost state revenue is likely to be considerably higher than this.

According to UN Comtrade data, in 2021 Cameroon reported timber product exports of more than US\$500 million, while importing countries declared around US\$750 million in purchases of Cameroonian timber products, equating to a discrepancy of around US\$250 million and a large potential tax loss for the state.³⁵ There is a striking gap between the value of exports and imports of timber products between Cameroon and two of its main trading partners, China and Vietnam. UN Comtrade data shows that between 2019 and 2021, Cameroon reported that it exported timber worth US\$366 million to China, while China declared imports from Cameroon valued at US\$674 million.³⁶ In the same period, Cameroon declared US\$237 million in exports of timber to Vietnam, compared to US\$479 million recorded in imports of Cameroonian timber by Vietnam.³⁷ These discrepancies – US\$308 million for trade to China and US\$242 million for Vietnam – are substantial (see Figure 1).

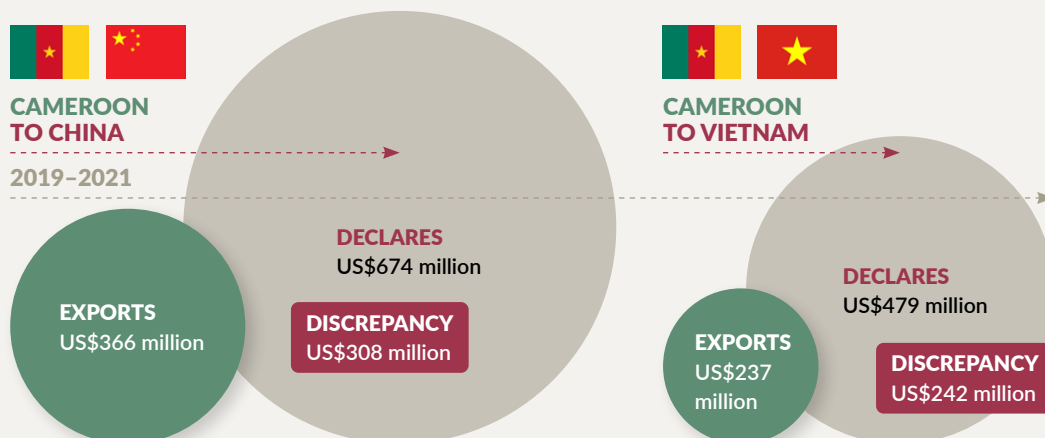


FIGURE 1 Discrepancies between value of timber imports and exports.

SOURCE: Adapted from Forest Trends, Timber Legality Risk Dashboard: Cameroon, August 2024, https://www.forest-trends.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Dashboard-Cameroon_Aug-2024-1-1.pdf



‘ILLEGALITIES’ INVOLVING THE AL FATIH NETWORK

Ebo, in central Cameroon, is among the Gulf of Guinea’s last remaining intact forests and the most biologically diverse.³⁸ It sits at the core of the Yabassi Key Biodiversity Area.³⁹ The forest is estimated to store 35 million tonnes of carbon and serves as a habitat for several rare and endangered species, such as forest elephants and grey parrots.⁴⁰ Two large logging concessions in Ebo, FMU 07-005 and FMU 07-006, were awarded to SCIEB and the little-known Sextransbois, respectively, through an opaque process that allegedly violates Cameroonian legislation.⁴¹ Both companies are linked to Al Fatih.⁴² Al Fatih owns SCIEB and has represented it and also Sextransbois – which is owned by his half-brother Mahmoud Mourtada – in official meetings on the Ebo forest.⁴³

The process started in February 2020, when a government decree aimed to open Ebo forest to logging by creating the two FMUs cited above.⁴⁴ However, in August 2020, these two FMUs were initially scrapped after an outcry by conservationists and local Indigenous communities.⁴⁵ This did not stop illegal construction of a road into Ebo forest, allegedly under the auspices of SCIEB, starting just south of the forest from another SCIEB concession, FMU 07-002.⁴⁶ A civil society monitoring mission found several potential illegalities, including the absence of an environmental impact study, lack of consultation with local communities, and extensive illegal logging near the road building site and in FMU 07-002.⁴⁷ It is not clear if SCIEB even has a forest management plan for FMU 07-002.⁴⁸

In 2023, the government resurrected FMU 07-005 (covering 65 007 hectares) and FMU 07-006 (68 385 hectares), awarding these concessions once again to SCIEB and Sextransbois, respectively. In doing so, the government reclassified part of the forest ‘private state property’ – a process that failed to comply with legal and regulatory provisions, according to civil society organizations. The two concessions, they claimed, were awarded without a public tendering process, despite this being a requirement under Cameroon’s forestry law.⁴⁹

According to international and local civil society organizations, both FMUs were granted without proper consultation of local Banen Indigenous people, leading some Banen groups to initiate (ongoing) legal proceedings demanding that the two concessions be scrapped for a second time.⁵⁰ They allege that the consultation process did not adhere to the requirements of the forestry law.⁵¹ Just two months after FMU 07-006 was re-issued to Sextransbois, the company obtained an annual felling certificate, designating volumes and species to be felled.⁵²

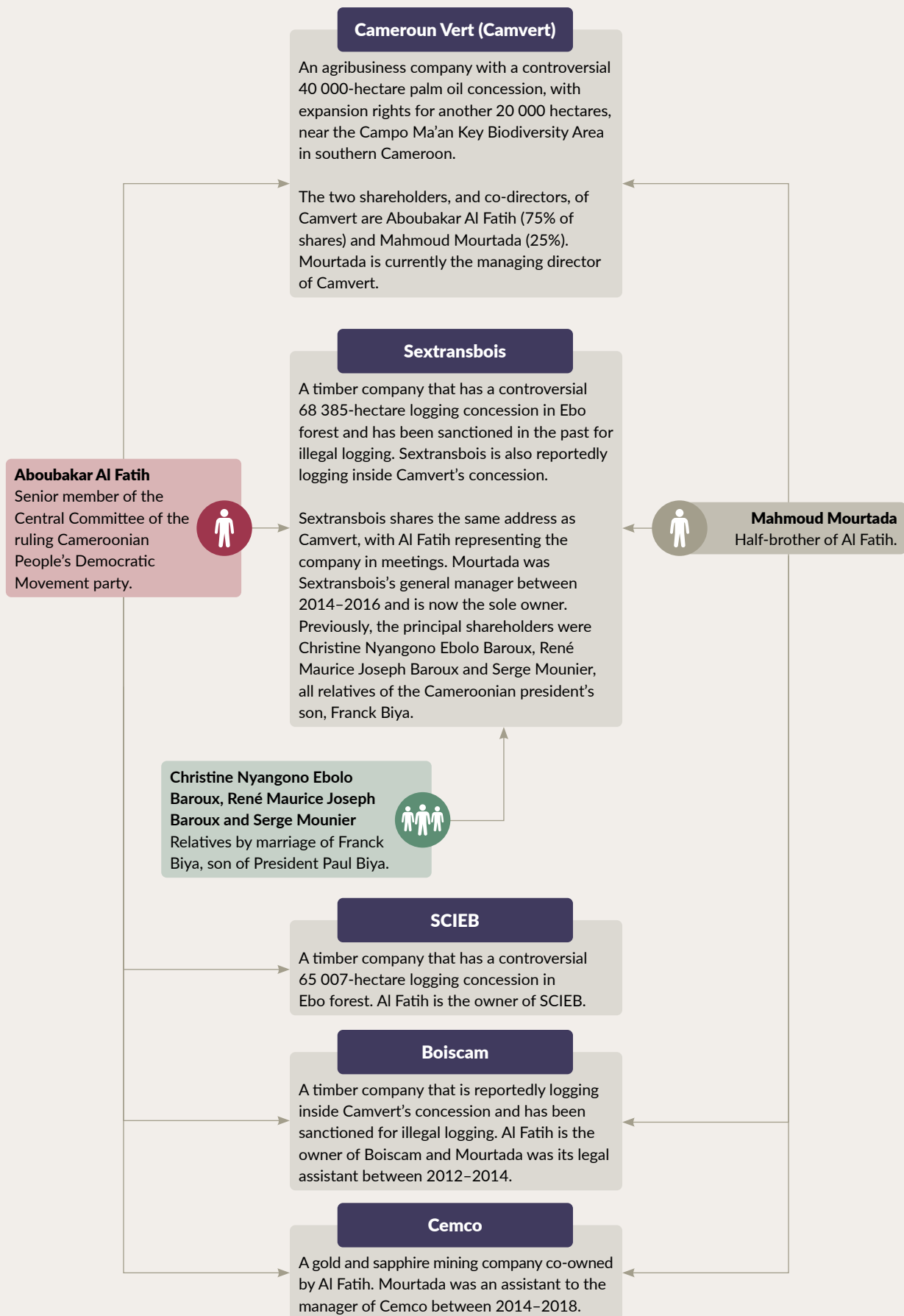


FIGURE 2 Political and business links of the Al Fatih network.



Logging concessions were awarded to certain companies in 2023 seemingly in violation of Cameroonian legislation. © Daniel Beloumou Olomo/AFP via Getty Images

However, according to civil society experts, a forest inventory – a prerequisite for specifying the permitted level of felling – could not have been carried out in this timeframe, suggesting that the decision to grant the FMU to Sextransbois was taken before the concession was even re-created.⁵³ Furthermore, Sextransbois has been authorized to cut beyond the legal limit of its concession, as the 30-year FMU should only allow for 2 280 hectares to be cut annually, not 2 500 hectares in six months as the certificate allows.⁵⁴

Sextransbois's activities are shrouded in secrecy. It ranks last for transparency out of 131 Cameroonian timber operators on

the World Resources Institute's Open Timber Portal; the company has not uploaded any of the required documents or made public any information on its operations.⁵⁵ Sextransbois has been sanctioned for illegal logging previously, which makes the decision to grant it an FMU even more questionable. In April 2018, Sextransbois's operations in one of its smaller *vente de coupe* logging concessions was suspended for three months by Minfof for 'non-compliance with the attribution process' – meaning it was unable to provide proof of legal origin for its timber.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, according to local residents and activists quoted by Mongabay, Sextransbois has already started to fell trees at its Ebo concession.⁵⁷ According to a source familiar with ongoing activity in Ebo forest, SCIEB has likewise already started logging in its own concession, despite allegedly not possessing a forest management plan (which, if true, would be a further violation of Cameroonian law).⁵⁸ According to residents interviewed by Mongabay, timber trucks from both concessions in Ebo are hauling wood across newly built roads to the port city of Douala almost daily.⁵⁹

Bribery allegations against Aboubakar Al Fatih

Al Fatih represented both SCIEB and Sextransbois in meetings related to the gazetting of Ebo as FMUs prior to the award of forest concessions in 2023, according to several sources who spoke to the GI-TOC and participated in the meetings.⁶⁰ Two sources – Indigenous Banen chiefs whose ancestral lands are in Ebo forest – claimed that Al Fatih attempted to bribe them to stop them from campaigning against gazettelement of the forest as FMUs and logging concessions. Specifically, in 2021 Al Fatih allegedly offered one Banen chief a new car, house and a position on a 'development committee' that would ostensibly grant development projects to local communities with funds provided by one of the logging companies.⁶¹ Another Banen chief claimed he was invited to meet Al Fatih alongside five other chiefs in 2022, in order to win their support for the construction of the illegal road in Ebo forest. They were allegedly given an envelope containing 1 million CFA francs (around US\$1 780 dollars) to be distributed between them for 'their accommodation' in Yaoundé, which the chief believed to constitute a bribe.⁶²

Exporting to the EU and possible 'transfer pricing'

SCIEB

Customs data shows that SCIEB exported timber products worth 1.81 billion CFA francs (US\$3.22 million) in 2023 and 1.07 billion CFA francs (US\$1.9 million) between January and October 2024.⁶³ In 2023, SCIEB exported to 16 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe, including Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Portugal. The exports to these EU countries were worth 405 million CFA francs (US\$0.72 million), consisting mostly of semi-processed sawn lumber from tropical hardwoods such as Iroko, Sipo, Bossé, Padouk and Moabi. Four shipments of raw Azobé and Bongossi logs were also exported to the EU. From January to October 2024, the company exported to 14 countries, including five in the EU (Belgium, Greece, Spain, France and Italy). The exports to these EU countries were valued at 138.7 million CFA francs (US\$0.25 million), consisting predominantly of Doussié rouge, Bipindensis, Acajou, Ngollon, Sipo and Iroko. One shipment of raw Azobé logs was also exported.

From 1 March 2023 until 1 October 2024 (the latest available date for customs data), SCIEB sold exclusively to one company, United Development (HK) Co Ltd, which bought 109 shipments of SCIEB timber products destined for 15 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe (all of the EU countries listed above). United Development (HK) Co Ltd appears to have no website or social media presence and there is very little information available online about the company. According to the Hong Kong companies' registry, it was incorporated in Hong Kong with a share capital of HKD10 000 (US\$1 287).⁶⁴ Its sole shareholder and director is a Chinese national named Hongjie Wang. According to a container manifest for one of its shipments, the company's address is listed as the Hong Kong Post Office, while a phone number listed is unavailable.⁶⁵

With such a low share capital, virtually no online presence and apparently no physical address, it is unlikely that United Development (HK) Co Ltd is operating as a legitimate global timber trader.

Comparing the value of shipments sold by SCIEB to United Development (HK) Co Ltd with the market price for wood listed by the International Tropical Timber Organization,

it seems that timber products are being sold at around half their true market price.⁶⁶ An experienced member of Cameroon's forestry industry cited this as an example of transfer pricing, where the Cameroonian-registered company (in this case SCIEB) sells timber products to United Development (HK) Co Ltd, which resells to the final client.⁶⁷ If correct, this scheme would mask the true profits in the country where the timber is harvested, enabling at least a partial evasion of taxation in Cameroon. Transfer pricing is illegal in Cameroon⁶⁸ and there is evidence that this tactic is also used by logging companies in other Congo Basin countries, including Gabon, the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁶⁹

Furthermore, the EU importers of SCIEB's timber products may be violating the EU Timber Regulation, which makes it illegal to import timber that has been logged in violation of the laws of the country of origin.⁷⁰ This is due to possible transfer pricing, the alleged illegal allocation of FMU 07-005 to SCIEB in May 2023, and previous findings linking the company to illegal road building and illegal logging.⁷¹

Sextransbois

Customs data for Sextransbois shows that the company exported timber products worth 5.4 billion CFA francs (US\$9.6 million) in 2023, mainly to China but also to Bangladesh and the Republic of the Congo, and 761 million CFA francs (US\$1.35 million) between January and October 2024.⁷² Sextransbois has secured Chinese financing, according to a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) study that cites Minfoc data.⁷³

Boiscam

Customs data for Boiscam, another Al Fatih-owned logging company, reveals that the company exported timber products worth around 60 million CFA francs (US\$0.11 million) in 2023 and 58.7 million CFA francs (US\$0.1 million) between January and October 2024, exclusively to China.⁷⁴ All of the timber products were bought by a single company, Transport Chang Negoce Ltd., which has a minimal online presence. Like Sextransbois, Boiscam also appears to benefit from Chinese financing, according to a WWF study.⁷⁵ ■

Camvert and Boiscam

Al Fatih is also the majority shareholder in Camvert, an agribusiness company that operates a controversial palm oil plantation near the Campo Ma'an Key Biodiversity Area in southern Cameroon.⁷⁶ Despite possessing no track record in agricultural production, Camvert obtained a 40 000 hectare palm oil concession in March 2022 and secured the right to expand this concession by 20 000 hectares.⁷⁷ However, its activities in the concession started considerably earlier, as the company signed agreements with local communities and reportedly carried out logging from April 2020 through its associated companies Boiscam and Sextransbois.⁷⁸



FIGURE 3 Timeline of key events.

Camvert's direct presence in the area coincided with the government's reclassification of this 60 000-hectare site from a logging concession (FMU 09-025) to an agricultural production site in November 2019.⁷⁹ Civil society organizations have pointed out illegalities in the reclassification process, characterized, they say, by violations of Cameroon's forestry law. The alleged violations include failing to issue an order seizing the land in the public interest and a failure to carry out an environmental impact assessment ahead of the reclassification.⁸⁰ These organizations also claim that the granting of the concession to Camvert did not meet the legal requirement of consulting with Indigenous Bagyeli communities whose customary forest lands overlap with the concession.⁸¹ This has led to a request by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to suspend or revoke Camvert's concession.⁸²

SCIEB had previously held the logging rights to FMU 09-025, ahead of it being granted to Camvert as an agricultural concession. As 'compensation', another FMU, 07-004, was created elsewhere and an equivalent logging concession of 60 000 hectares granted to SCIEB, without a public tender – a process that was rushed through in record time, according to a forestry expert.⁸³ According to the environmental and social impact assessment for Camvert's agricultural project, the accelerated approval of a compensatory site for SCIEB was explicitly to allow for the rapid acquirement of Camvert's area for palm oil production.⁸⁴ The fact that the companies are linked and appear to be controlled by the same people makes the process in this instance deeply questionable.

The logging of trees in the Camvert concession (to make way for planting oil palm trees) is being carried out by another Al Fatih-owned company, Boiscom, according to Boiscom workers and a Minfop official from the area.⁸⁵ In November 2024, a local community sent a petition to the authorities and accused Boiscom of logging outside its permitted area and of failing to sign social development agreements as required by law.⁸⁶ In April 2018, Boiscom's operations in one of its logging concessions were suspended for three months by Minfop for failing to provide evidence of the legal origin of its timber.⁸⁷ In addition, in December 2020 an independent monitoring mission likewise found Boiscom was felling trees outside its permitted boundaries.⁸⁸

Sextransbois also appears to be logging in Camvert's palm oil concession. A regional media outlet reported that the company obtained an undisclosed permit in April 2020 to log 2 500 hectares 'for the benefit of the Camvert project'.⁸⁹ This indicates that Camvert held rights at that time to these 2 500 hectares, but this would be illegal according to civil society lawyers, since Camvert did not obtain the concession for the wider site that this small area fell within for a further two years.⁹⁰

A further five logging permits, each of 2 500 hectares, were then granted to various companies in February 2022 as part of the implementation of the Camvert project, likewise before the concession was granted to the company in March that year.⁹¹ Greenpeace claims this is illegal, along with clauses within these permits that allow for irregular durations and renewal options.⁹² Two of these five permits were granted to Société forestière des frères du Cameroun, whose general operations were suspended in May 2024 due to logging beyond the boundaries of one of its permits, the use of fraudulent documentation and non-compliance with social development agreements.⁹³

Deforestation in the area has accelerated since 2020, after it was reclassified for agricultural production but before the concession was officially granted to Camvert. According to spatial mapping by the Forest People's Programme, as of 14 March 2023, over 6 000 hectares of forest had been cleared, representing over 15% of the existing concession.⁹⁴

Camvert's impact on forest communities

Camvert has also been accused of having a detrimental impact on local populations. Indeed, a resident and a former Camvert worker reported that the company is failing in its commitment to fulfil social development agreements, which include building roads and hospitals – a legal requirement that can, when flouted, lead to sanctions or suspension.⁹⁵ In November 2024, one community sent a petition to local authorities, accusing Camvert of failing to fulfil their obligations and of 'influence peddling' with chiefs.⁹⁶ In 2021, Greenpeace visited 14 villages in the Camvert concession and found that promises made by the company to equip schools with benches, books and other materials had not been kept and that many villagers did not know what agreements had been struck.⁹⁷

They also found an increase in human-wildlife contact and loss of crops blamed on forest clearance by Camvert. One villager told Greenpeace that if you complain you are told to 'shut your mouth, here's 20 000 CFA francs [US\$36], if you keep complaining you are put in jail'.

'How am I supposed to live with that? How am I supposed to feed this big family of mine when they've taken my whole forest?' the villager lamented.



THE AL FATIH NETWORK'S POLITICAL LINKS

Civil society and forestry experts reported that politically powerful individuals are associated with the Al Fatih-linked network of companies. This may explain how the network has been able to gain large concessions in forested areas without competition and continue their logging operations despite credible alleged violations of the law.⁹⁸

Public face: well-connected brothers

In an interview with a regional media outlet, Al Fatih describes himself as a committed activist for the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), and a member of the permanent delegation of its central committee in Mayo-Banyo, a department in northern Cameroon.⁹⁹ In March 2025, President Paul Biya declared Al Fatih a senior member of the CPDM's Central Committee, the ruling party's most powerful decision-making body.¹⁰⁰ He is reportedly the protégé of a group of influential ruling party politicians from Mayo-Banyo, which is also located in the predominantly Muslim province of Adamawa.¹⁰¹ His mentors reportedly include the late Hamadjoda Adjoudji, a former deputy secretary general of the ruling party and one of the government's longest serving ministers.¹⁰² According to Greenpeace, Al Fatih was made a knight of merit by President Biya in 2013, an award ostensibly bestowed in recognition of outstanding service in the public or professional sphere.¹⁰³

As noted earlier, Al Fatih has ties with at least three logging companies (Boiscam, SCIEB and Sextransbois) and an agribusiness company (Camvert), all of which have benefited from large land concessions in recent years. He also retains an interest in Cemco, a gold and sapphire mining company.¹⁰⁴ He is reportedly the CEO and owner of Boiscam and the owner of SCIEB. Alongside possessing several FMUs, SCIEB is building a large sawmill facility, a biomass electricity plant and an industrial wood pulp factory in the city of Edea.¹⁰⁵ In a media interview, Al Fatih refers to his 'Boiscam group' of logging companies.¹⁰⁶ Camvert's company statutes also show that Al Fatih owns 75% of Camvert, with the remaining 25% belonging to Mourtada, the managing director of the company.¹⁰⁷ According to the same document, Al Fatih and Mourtada share the same father and have the same birthplace (Banyo, in the department of Mayo-Banyo).¹⁰⁸

Mourtada's connections to Al Fatih-linked companies run deep. In the past, Mourtada worked for Boiscam and Cemco.¹⁰⁹ According to company documents, Mourtada is also the owner of Sextransbois

and was its general manager from 2014 to 2016.¹¹⁰ Sextransbois shares the same postal address as Camvert and interviewees reported that Al Fatih represented the company's interests during meetings about the classification of an FMU subsequently granted to the company.¹¹¹

Close links between Camvert, SCIEB, Sextransbois and Boiscam were also confirmed by meetings held with senior staff. A call to the Camvert office elicited contact emails for the three Al Fatih-linked logging companies and subsequent online meetings were held jointly with members of these three companies.¹¹² In one of the meetings, an employee stated that the logging companies were part of the 'same group'.¹¹³ In another meeting, a Boiscam employee was wearing a Camvert uniform.¹¹⁴ Similarly, a company representative with a Boiscam email address introduced themselves as the manager of Sextransbois. This same employee responded to questions about the general capacity of the three companies to produce quantities and species of timber.¹¹⁵

Al Fatih's principal investors are reportedly from Asia and the Middle East.¹¹⁶ Boiscam and Sextransbois are both listed as benefiting from Chinese financing in studies by WWF, which cites Minfof data.¹¹⁷

Sextransbois's links to the family of the president's son

One of the most controversial and secretive logging companies in Al Fatih's network appears to be Sextransbois.¹¹⁸ A 2014 corporate registry document for the company lists the shareholders at the time as Christine Nyangono Ebolo Baroux, René Maurice Joseph Baroux and Serge Mounier¹¹⁹ – who are all relatives, by marriage, of Franck Biya, a political power broker, potential candidate in the 2025 presidential election and President Biya's eldest son.¹²⁰ According to regional media, Franck Biya is an advisor to his father and has an office in Etoudi Palace, the president's main residence.¹²¹ Sextransbois was incorporated in the corporate registry of Sangmélina, a centre of power for President Biya, who was born close by.¹²²

Taking a closer look at the relationships between the shareholders and Franck Biya uncovers an intricate web of family relations: Christine Nyangono Ebolo Baroux is Franck Biya's mother-in-law, René Maurice Joseph Baroux (now deceased) was his father-in-law and Serge Mounier, referred to as Serge Mounier Baroux in other documents, is his brother-in-law.¹²³ Christine Nyangono Ebolo Baroux is also listed as the departing manager of the company in the corporate registry document. It is not clear if she had previous experience in the forestry sector. The corporate registry document passed immediate sole ownership and management, in May 2014, of Sextransbois to Mourtada, who was only 20 years old at the time and is the current co-owner and managing director of Camvert. Mourtada was in May 2014 a student at Yaoundé University, where he combined his studies with a job as a legal assistant – his only previous work experience, according to LinkedIn – for Boiscam.¹²⁴ Once he became Sextransbois's owner and manager, he stopped working for Boiscam but started another job in Al Fatih's network as an assistant to the manager of Cemco.¹²⁵

Franck Biya's in-laws appear to have other business interests related to Cameroon's forests. A company named René Baroux France, operating in Dunkerque, was accused of buying illegal Cameroonian wood in 2008 by Friends of the Earth.¹²⁶ René Maurice Joseph Baroux died in 2014 in Cap Martin, a prestigious coastal area of southern France, where Franck Biya owns a mansion.¹²⁷ Franck Biya's brother-in-law, Serge Mounier Baroux, is a director of Sud-Cameroun Hévéa (Sudcam), a company that has been accused of violating national legislation in obtaining a permit that cleared 10 000 hectares of forest in southern Cameroon to make way for a rubber plantation.¹²⁸ Twenty per cent of Sudcam is owned by an opaque company, Société de Production de Palmeraies et d'Hévéa S.A., an entity that

Greenpeace Africa claims is allegedly linked to an 'influential member of the Cameroonian political elite'. Local community members told Greenpeace that Sudcam was described to them by the then defence minister, Rémy Ze Meka, in a meeting with village chiefs as 'the company of the president'; the president also has a palace close to Sudcam's concession.¹²⁹ In 2021, Serge Mounier was made a 'knight of merit' by President Biya.¹³⁰ In a response to Greenpeace Africa's claims, Sudcam's owner, Halcyon Agri, stated that SUDCAM 'operates within the law of the Republic of Cameroon' and that the company 'has no special ties to the government nor do we support a political party'.¹³¹

These family ties are not the only indications of Franck Biya's links to Cameroon's timber sector. On the contrary, he reportedly has a long history of owning or part-owning logging companies. According to regional media, he was a shareholder, alongside his cousin and current lawmaker Bonaventure Mvondo Assam, in Compagnie Forestière Assam (Cofa).¹³² Local media reported that Cofa's activities were temporarily suspended in 2019 for illegal logging outside the limits of its permit.¹³³ Franck Biya has also been named as the majority shareholder in Patrice Bois, a logging company accused of illegal logging on multiple occasions between 2002 and 2005.¹³⁴ Local media claims he founded two other logging companies, Ingénierie forestière and Société commerciale industrielle et forestière, both of which have been accused of illegal logging.¹³⁵

Who's behind the network and why does it matter?

The transfer of ownership of Sextransbois – an entity that has benefitted particularly strongly from favourable high-level decisions – in 2014 from three members of Franck Biya's family to Mourtada raises questions about the beneficial (i.e. real) ownership being obscured. Questions abound as to how a 20-year-old student with limited experience became the sole owner and general manager of a logging company.

A logging contract between forest communities and Sextransbois dated a few months after Franck Biya's in-laws left the company in 2014 raises the question of whether there was an attempt to hide the previous ownership from potential scrutiny.¹³⁶ A local official involved in the drafting of the logging contract reported that there was pressure to approve the contract, in a context where he understood Mourtada to be a vessel for powerful interests.¹³⁷ In February 2018, Sextransbois was removed from the corporate registry of Sangmélina for unknown reasons.¹³⁸ Two months later, operations in one of Sextransbois's logging concessions were suspended for three months by Minfof due to the company's failure to provide proof of legal origin of its timber.¹³⁹

Mourtada's part ownership of Camvert indicates that his potential role as a controlled nominee stretches beyond Sextransbois.

Significant political allies of Franck Biya have allegedly supported the creation of logging concessions granted to Sextransbois and SCIEB. According to local media and a source who is familiar with the case, Samuel Mvondo Ayolo, a political ally and friend of Franck Biya, supported the original creation of FMU 007-06 in Ebo forest in 2020 in his capacity as the cabinet director of the president's office.¹⁴⁰ Authorization by the president's office, in the form of a 'visa stamp', is needed for documents that require the highest level of approval, such as the creation of an FMU. According to local media, a rival power bloc in the ruling party then successfully challenged the decision to allocate the FMU.¹⁴¹ This bloc's opposition to Franck Biya was widely reported at the time.¹⁴² By 2023, when efforts to create the logging concessions resurfaced and ultimately enabled Sextransbois and SCIEB to secure permits, the two rival political camps had reportedly reconciled.¹⁴³

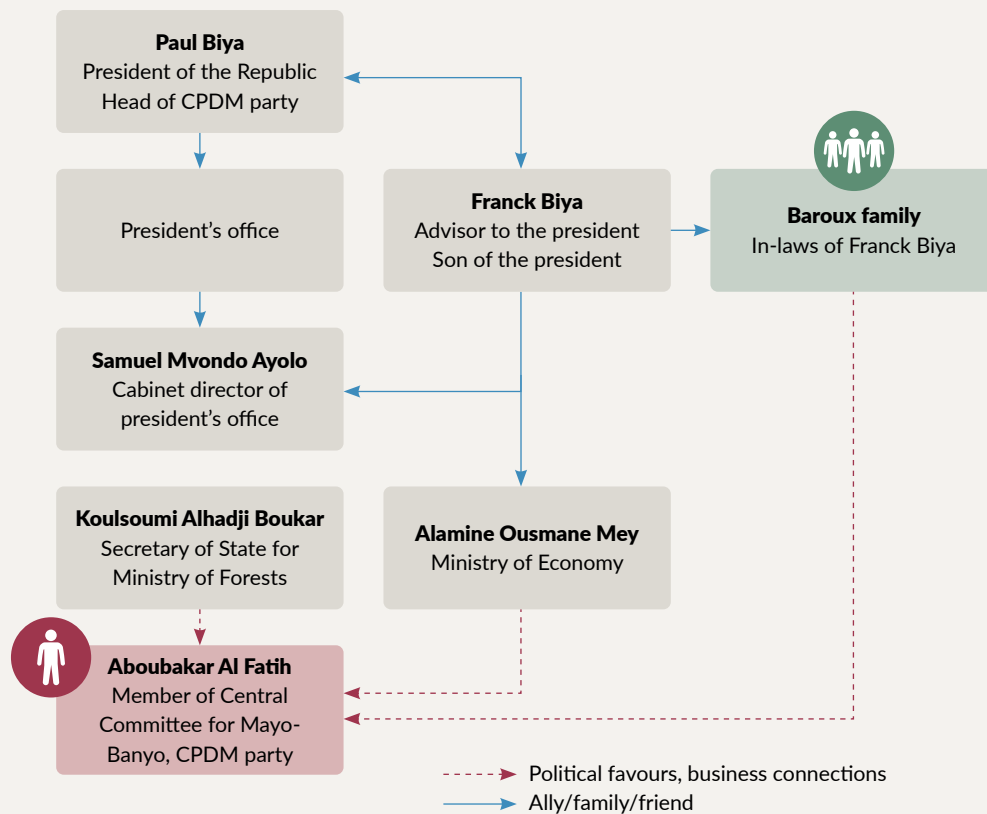


FIGURE 4 Political connections of the Al Fatih network.

There are indications that the interests of the Al Fatih network are also being facilitated by Alamine Ousmane Mey, the country's long-serving economy minister and another friend and ally of Franck Biya.¹⁴⁴ The economy ministry is responsible not only for economic planning, but also regional development strategies encompassing all sectors, including forestry. The minister represents the government to multilateral bodies and donors, including the Central African Forest Initiative.¹⁴⁵ A well-placed former Minfof official claimed that Ousmane Mey is 'the hidden hand' behind the Al Fatih network and is granting his companies political favours.¹⁴⁶ Although Ousmane Mey has no official role in the allocation of logging permits, his influence and power are significant and Minfof carries out his instructions, according to this former official.¹⁴⁷

An informal broker who connects logging companies with Minfof likewise claimed that Ousmane Mey 'sponsors' the Al Fatih network.¹⁴⁸ Ousmane Mey is reportedly a close childhood friend of Franck Biya, and his first senior position – that of finance minister, a role he secured in 2011 – came thanks to Franck Biya recommending him to President Biya, according to regional media outlets.¹⁴⁹ He has also been touted as a potential successor to the president.¹⁵⁰

A further link between the Al Fatih network and Mey can be found in the Secretary of State for Minfof, Kouloumi Alhadji Boukar. Reporting only to the minister, Alhadji Boukar holds the second most powerful post at Minfof, providing him with direct oversight of the creation of FMUs. The above-mentioned informal broker reported that Alhadji Boukar backs Al Fatih's companies at the

ministry.¹⁵¹ The broker claims that Alhadji Boukar's younger brother is Ousmane Mey's bodyguard and acts as a facilitator for logging companies who want access to Alhadji Boukar.¹⁵² Alhadji Boukar is from the same province of Adamawa (northern Cameroon) as Al Fatih and Mourtada, and she is a relative of the Sultan of Wandala.¹⁵³ Ousmane Mey also comes from a powerful dynastic family in northern Cameroon, where his father was the governor under the regime that preceded President Biya.¹⁵⁴

Allegations of undue influence

Two sources, a civil society actor and Minfof official, suggested that the ultimate decision to create the Ebo forest concessions, both in 2020 and again in 2023, took place within the president's office. By law, the creation of an FMU is subject to technical preparation and recommendation by Minfof, the above-mentioned 'visa' of the presidency and final approval by the prime minister. However, it appears that the president's office exercised undue influence over the process. A key civil society actor spoke in 2020 to Minfof staff who claim they came under pressure from the president's office to create these concessions.¹⁵⁵ Another Minfof official who is deeply familiar with the case alleged that the president's office again exerted undue influence in 2023, to ensure that the concessions were allocated without due scrutiny.¹⁵⁶

Other sources underline the opacity of the decision-making process. Minfof is also responsible for overseeing the overall process of allocating FMUs to logging companies. However, a former Minfof official reported that the staff who were ostensibly in charge of the 2023 permit allocation process in Ebo forest never saw any documentation supporting the process (such as a public call for tender), which ultimately led to Sextransbois and SCIEB obtaining permits.¹⁵⁷ The relevant Minfof staff were too scared to dig any deeper, according to this official.



HOW CORRUPTION FUELS ILLEGAL LOGGING

The GI-TOC interviewed current and former Minfop officials, employees of logging companies, informal facilitators in the timber sector, representatives of timber trading companies, and Cameroonian and international civil society and forestry experts. These individuals possess direct knowledge of the timber sector in Cameroon and they outlined the modalities of corruption that facilitate illegal logging. We set out the claims made by these sources regarding corrupt practices in the sections below. The picture their testimonies paint is clear: corruption and high-level impunity at the top enables a broader ecosystem of corruption, characterized also by lower-level officials getting away with taking bribes and blocking reform attempts. As a result, corruption and illegal activity are endemic at each stage of the timber supply chain, from the allocation of logging permits to the itemization of forest inventories and creation of management plans, and the harvesting, transport and export of wood.

Forest classification

Forest classification is the process whereby Cameroon's government classifies areas of forest for logging. By law, local communities should be consulted before the government publishes a decree creating an FMU as a designated logging site.¹⁵⁸ In practice, however, FMUs have been granted without proper consultation with local communities, which civil society groups claim is illegal.¹⁵⁹ As noted above, over 68 000 hectares of the Ebo forest were reclassified as 'private state property' in 2023 and granted as an FMU to Sextransbois in a process that civil society organizations claim failed to consult Banen Indigenous people.¹⁶⁰

Permit allocations

The permit allocation process refers to a procedure by which a logging permit, usually either a 30-year FMU or a three-year *vente de coupe* is allocated to private companies.¹⁶¹ By law, a logging permit should be allocated after a public call for tender and on the basis of the selection of the best financial and technical bidder by an inter-ministerial commission, chaired by the head of Minfop.¹⁶² However, according to two sources close to Minfop, the legal procedures are routinely ignored, with most companies paying a bribe to corrupt Minfop officials to obtain a logging permit.¹⁶³ One of the

sources claimed this is 'the rule' rather than the exception.¹⁶⁴ Another source, who worked for several logging companies in Cameroon, reported that companies he worked for pay between 2 500 CFA francs (US\$4.50) and 5 000 CFA francs (US\$9) per hectare for the required permit, resulting in a 50 000-hectare FMU costing between US\$225 000 and US\$450 000 in bribes.¹⁶⁵

There is also a legal requirement to publish the invitation to tender, but these documents are rarely made public, according to a Minfof advisor.¹⁶⁶ For example, no public invitation to tender was announced for the award of FMU 07-006 to Sextransbois.¹⁶⁷ According to the Minfof advisor, all but four of the 90 logging companies active in Cameroon violate forestry laws; the four exceptions are all certified through the Forest Sustainability Council's standards.¹⁶⁸

Informal intermediaries are crucial to the bribery process for permits. One of these facilitators explained the process: first, an intermediary will arrange a meeting with senior Minfof staff, alongside 'their people' in other Minfof departments who are needed to approve a logging permit.¹⁶⁹ Bribes are not paid directly to these senior members, but are kicked up to them after a follow-up meeting with the intermediary's contacts within Minfof (i.e. 'their people'). In these private meetings, the Minfof departmental personnel will confirm the cost of each document required for a logging permit. At the same time, the intermediary explained, another bribe must be paid to someone in the president's office, to ensure the relevant documents receive high-level approval.

The intermediary used an example of a current client to illustrate the process. In May 2024, when GI-TOC spoke to the intermediary, no FMUs or *ventes de coupe* could officially be allocated to logging companies by Minfof until the next application round. However, 'everything is possible... if you have money,' the intermediary confided.¹⁷⁰ The intermediary's client, the owner of a logging company, was seeking to get back a *vente de coupe* permit after it had been confiscated. Having initially paid bribes at each stage to obtain the original permit, he then paid a further bribe to join the bidding for a new *vente de coupe*. At the time of the interview, he was seeking investors to fund the 'millions' of CFA francs (thousands of US dollars) needed for the final bribe to complete the process.¹⁷¹

An intermediary can also introduce prospective companies to more influential facilitators, who may have familial ties with senior officials.¹⁷² Once bribes have been paid to Minfof staff at the national level in the capital, Yaoundé, there are other 'challenges', according to an ex-logger.¹⁷³ This source described paying multiple bribes to ministry officials, before abandoning his logging plans altogether due to the expense of having to pay yet more money.

Pre-harvesting

The pre-harvesting phase is when a logging company puts together a forest management plan with an inventory of the species, volumes, minimum diameters and locations of trees they aim to harvest in their FMU.¹⁷⁴ The plan outlines the annual allowable cut, which is the maximum amount of timber that can be harvested each year over a 30-year rotation period, in order to avoid over-exploitation. The forest management plan must be validated by Minfof and affected local communities should be consulted during the process.¹⁷⁵ Social development agreements must be reached with communities, such as the building of health centres, while a percentage of the annual forestry royalty tax paid by companies should, by law, be redistributed to local populations.¹⁷⁶

In reality, these legal requirements are routinely flouted. An advisor to Minfof and an experienced forestry sector member both reported that Minfof rarely checks the inventory or management plan

to see if they comply with the law.¹⁷⁷ According to the forester, most logging companies start operating their FMUs illegally before they are officially allowed to commence logging.¹⁷⁸ Inventories are fraudulently over-inflated to enable logging beyond permitted boundaries, a dynamic that is especially prevalent for *ventes de coupe*.¹⁷⁹ In addition, no management plan is legally required for *ventes de coupe*, leading to them being dubbed 'cut and run' permits. *Ventes de coupe* are typically exploited quickly and destructively, acting as a gateway for illegal logging activities.¹⁸⁰

Timber harvesting

Timber harvesting encompasses the felling, physical marking of logs and recording of relevant information (species names, volume, size, geolocation and concession name) in a 'DF10' site logbook that is checked and validated by Minfof officials.¹⁸¹ The information provided in the DF10 is used to calculate the felling tax owed by logging companies to the state. It is a declaration-based system as the data is not immediately digitized under the forest information management system (a system known as 'SIGIF 2'). According to the regulation of Cameroon's forest code, a Minfof official should be assigned to a logging site to co-sign the DF10 logbook and place regulatory marks to identify each log before it leaves the forest.¹⁸²

The most common illegality at the harvesting phase involves logging outside the designated boundaries and fraudulently labelling the timber as legally sourced from within the permitted area.¹⁸³ The companies then receive official authorization from Minfof, facilitating the illegal harvesting of significant quantities of timber beyond the designated area.



The most common manifestation of illegality in the harvesting phase was found to be logging outside designated boundaries and fraudulently labelling timber as legally sourced from within permitted areas. © Daniel Beloumou Olomo/AFP via Getty Images

Timber laundering is prevalent in forest concessions allocated through FMUs. However, it is especially widespread for *ventes de coupe* permits, which have proliferated in recent years. From 2013 to 2022, Minfop issued at least 548 *ventes de coupe*, covering almost 1 million hectares, to around 143 companies.¹⁸⁴ A consultant for logging companies reported that it is easy to label timber felled outside a permit's area with false geolocation coordinates.¹⁸⁵ The abuse of permits by logging companies has been compounded by failures in the state response. Between 2015 and 2020, Minfop sanctioned 27 logging companies for illegal practices, many for logging beyond their legal boundaries – yet these companies continued to secure new *ventes de coupe* permits, even after multiple infractions.¹⁸⁶

Fraudulent use of DF10 logbooks – as well as the corresponding waybills (a document that lists similar information to the DF10 and is used to calculate additional taxes¹⁸⁷) or timber transport documents – is extensive. Three former logging company workers explained how the system of bribery and fraud functions.¹⁸⁸ The declaration system allows for corruption as loggers can easily put erroneous information on the documents, which are then validated and signed by corrupt officials.¹⁸⁹ DF10s and waybills may under-declare the volume of timber, wrongly identify species as less valuable wood or specify a false harvesting location. Forestry department officials often hand over the 'hammer' – a tool used to mark identifying numbers physically on logs of timber – to the companies themselves to use as they please.¹⁹⁰ The documents (DF10s, waybills and timber transport permits) are also sold by Minfop officials to companies that do not have permits, a source said.¹⁹¹

The first official to check documentation is the Minfop control post head, who receives a monthly bribe, usually an envelope of bank notes holding between 2 000 and 5 000 CFA francs (US\$3.50–US\$9.00) from each company to allow logging trucks to pass through with fraudulent waybills.¹⁹² Sources say that other more senior Minfop officials are also bribed in person, including the divisional and regional delegates, to allow the timber to leave the concession.¹⁹³ One source described how he personally delivered bribes to the regional Minfop delegate. At the national level, Minfop officials, allegedly also including the minister, sometimes contact regional Minfop officials directly to tell them to allow their favoured companies to operate illegally.¹⁹⁴

The same source said that they witnessed various types of illegal activity first-hand, together with one of their former employers: felling outside the concession area, cutting smaller trees than the management plan allowed, under-declaring the number of trees harvested by 80% (to avoid taxes) and transporting unmarked wood to sawmills.¹⁹⁵

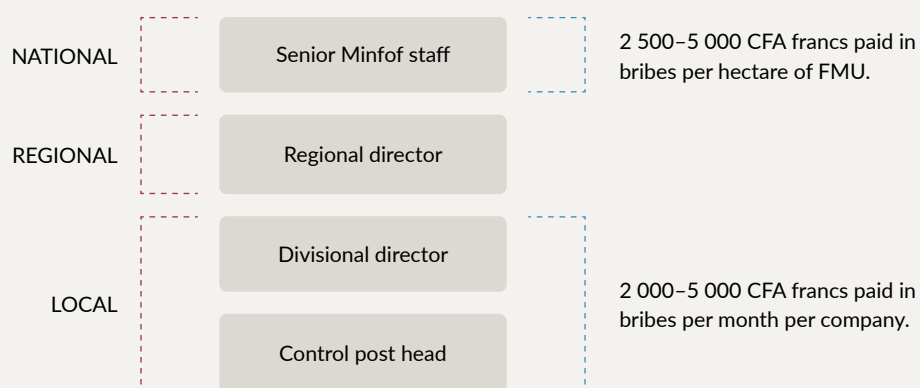


FIGURE 5 Money flows from Minfop.

Timber transport

This phase covers the transportation of logs by trucks, usually from a logging yard near the harvesting site to a saw mill for processing or for export as raw logs. Drivers should possess a waybill that should be checked and validated by the local Minfof control post head and then again at road check points manned jointly by Minfof agents, police, customs and the gendarmerie.

Waybills are open to corruption risks and fraudulent declarations are commonplace. A forestry department official in Cameroon's East Region told the GI-TOC that some Minfof staff provide logging companies with pre-signed blank waybills in exchange for bribes.¹⁹⁶ This official confirmed that trucks carrying illegal timber are allowed to pass inspection posts without being checked, often with support from national Minfof staff in Yaoundé who provide irregular authorizations in phone calls.¹⁹⁷ This source also stated that the Minfof departmental head in Lom-et-Djerem is the main facilitator of illegal logging in the East Region, alongside the control post head in Mandjou, where logging trucks pass en route to central Cameroon.

A former Minfof official stated that logging companies pay bribes at every checkpoint, and that there is corruption at the final control post at the port.¹⁹⁸ These payments are usually made in advance to checkpoint staff, who also receive the registration numbers of the vehicles to allow them to pass through unchecked.¹⁹⁹ An investigation by the media houses Infocongo and Le Monde identified at least eight checkpoints where trucks carrying unmarked timber are allowed to pass daily.²⁰⁰ Most of the unmarked wood is then processed at Chinese and Vietnamese-owned sawmills in Yaoundé and Douala before export.

Timber export

The export process represents the final stage. Processed wood or raw logs are exported by boat, principally from the ports of Douala or Kribi. Illegality at this stage of the process mostly involves illegal transactions between Chinese and Vietnamese traders and their timber suppliers, typically at night in one of the many transit parks located in these two key ports or in Yaoundé.²⁰¹ These traders pay their suppliers in cash without complying with any requirements relating to the legality of the wood, which usually comes from smugglers working without permits or from companies possessing a *vente de coupe*. The payments range from hundreds of thousands to tens of millions of CFA francs and allow the trader – who does not register a tax file – to avoid paying VAT and other taxes accruing from the purchase of timber.²⁰² Moreover, it enables the timber supplier to maintain their documentation, without having to hand over DF10s and waybills to the authorities, which can be used later for subsequent transactions.

Some illegal loggers, mostly Chinese and Korean groups, harvest timber without permits and bribe customs officials at Cameroon's ports to register their timber as a different export item.²⁰³



CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Widespread fraud and illegal activities undermine every stage of the timber supply chain in Cameroon, from forest classification and logging permit allocation to timber harvesting, transport and export. Bribery is common throughout, with logging companies paying off officials at Minfof to bypass legal procedures, inflate forest inventories and launder timber through fraudulent documentation. This results in illegal logging practices, including exporting unmarked timber, often with the complicity of customs and port officials.

Illegality, however, extends far beyond Cameroon's borders. SCIEB is selling timber to several EU countries, whose importers are likely to be in breach of the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR). SCIEB may also be carrying out 'transfer pricing' through Hong Kong, thus evading paying taxes on its profits in Cameroon.

In short, the timber sector in Cameroon is plagued by environmental degradation and violations of local communities' rights, with only a small fraction of companies adhering to international sustainability standards. Going forward, the following steps could be taken to hold those responsible for environmental crimes to account:

For the Cameroonian authorities:

- The Cameroonian authorities, specifically Minfof and the president's office, should immediately cancel FMU 07-005 and FMU 07-006 in Ebo forest, and simultaneously overturn the reclassification of 60 000 hectares of FMU 09-025 as an agricultural production site near the Campo Ma'an Key Biodiversity Area. All permits for logging or agricultural production granted during these processes – including to SCIEB, Sextransbois, Boisacam and Camvert – should be cancelled.
- Minfof should investigate the alleged lack of a forest management plan or environmental impact assessment, as required by law, for SCIEB's FMU 07-002.
- The relevant Cameroonian authorities should investigate potential tax evasion by SCIEB through possible transfer pricing.
- The relevant Cameroonian authorities should investigate alleged attempts by Aboubakar Al Fatih to bribe two Indigenous Banen chiefs whose ancestral lands lie within the Ebo forest.
- The relevant Cameroonian authorities should investigate the alleged granting of political favours to the Al Fatih network, including alleged undue influence exercised by the president's office, Economy Minister Alamine Ousmane Mey and Minfof Secretary of State Koulsoumi Alhadji Boukar.

- Minfoc and Cameroon's anti-corruption agencies must address the systematic corruption in the country's timber sector, including pervasive bribery at all levels of Minfoc.
- Minfoc and Cameroon's law enforcement bodies must allocate resources for and support the genuine enforcement of Cameroon's forestry laws that are being routinely flouted both by private sector actors and by public officials tasked with their enforcement. Laws related to *ventes de coupe* titles should be strengthened to legally require operators to submit a forest management plan.
- Minfoc should make improvements to its forest information management system, SIGIF 2, in line with recommendations already made by the EU.²⁰⁴
- The Cameroonian authorities should support local civil society efforts to expose illegalities and corruption in the timber sector, including the work of independent forest monitoring.

For the European Union:

- The competent authorities responsible for implementation of the EUTR should identify and investigate EU-based operators and traders in Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Portugal who import timber products from SCIEB.
- The competent authorities should identify and investigate EU-based operators and traders who import timber products harvested by SCIEB, Sextransbois and Boiscam and which have been processed in third countries, such as China.
- When the EUTR is repealed on 30 December 2025, to make way for the EU Regulation on Deforestation-free products, the competent authorities under the new instrument should identify and investigate EU-based operators and traders who import timber products from SCIEB, Sextransbois and Boiscam. They should also identify, investigate and sanction, if appropriate, any EU importers of palm oil products from Camvert.
- The EU, as a major donor to Cameroon's forestry sector, through for example multi-partner funds such as the Central African Forest Initiative, should demand improvements in enforcement of Cameroon's forestry laws as well as to Cameroon's EU-funded forest information management system, SIGIF 2, the deficiencies of which have been highlighted previously by the EU.
- The EU should demand the repeal of FMU 07-005 and FMU 07-006 (awarded respectively to SCIEB and Sextransbois) in Ebo forest. It should also demand the repeal of the reclassification of 60 000 hectares of FMU 09-025 for agricultural production near the Campo Ma'an Key Biodiversity Area (inclusive of Camvert's palm oil permit and the *ventes de coupe* awarded to Sextransbois and Boiscam). The EU should also demand an investigation into SCIEB's alleged failure to formulate a forest management plan or environmental impact assessment, as required by law, for FMU 07-002.
- The EU should support conservation-based efforts as alternatives to industrial exploitation in the Ebo forest and Campo Ma'an areas.
- The EU should make these demands a condition for its support of the Central African Forest Initiative's recently announced 2025–2035 partnership with Cameroon, including the US\$60 million in initial funding.
- The EU should support local and international civil society efforts to ensure Cameroon honours its commitment to halt and reverse forest loss as a signatory to the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, including through independent forest monitoring, policy advocacy and investigations.



NOTES

- 1 See Global Forest Watch, Cameroon dashboard 2024, <https://www.globalforestwatch.org>.
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