

Learning by Ear – Environment

07 – Deforestation

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Intro

Hello and welcome to Learning By Ear's special series that takes a look at the environment. Today you'll hear about the devastating consequences of deforestation on our environment. During the 1980s and 1990s Africa lost more forest than any other continent on the planet as the demand for firewood, grazing land and prized timber spiralled out of control. Africa's forests continue to be stripped bare at an alarming rate. Today's Radionovela will tell the tale of the illegal timber companies operating on the continent.

Music – 0:30

Radionovela

SFX: Television_background_noise

1. Monica: Moses, your new television and DVD player are fancy! Last time I was at your

house there was on old TV with a cracked screen...

2. Moses: Monica, I know, but then dad got a new job and now we are rich.

3. Gladys: [exclaims] Wow that was quick...

4. Monica: Too quick!!

5. Monica: He works for an international company, from Asia.

6. Gladys: [curious] Doing what exactly?

7. Moses: Gladys, it's a timber company. He has a job at the logging plant about 30km away, in the forest near Malabar. Dad says the wood is sold to China and Europe.

[SFX: Monica slams down her cup on the table]

8. Monica: Do you know the damage those logging companies are doing to our environment?!

9. Moses: [defensively] What?! It's just forest. Dad says China has the world's fastest growing economy in the world. They need timber for

building materials and making furniture. It's easy money for our poor community!

10. Monica: Easy money maybe, but those forests will never recover!

SFX: Television switched off

11. Monica: Let's go...

12. Moses: Where?

13. Monica: To the plant. We'll go with my brother, Soloman. He works for a local community project working to save the forests...

SFX: Door Closes. X-fade into sound of travelling vehicle

14. Moses: You see, before there wasn't even a road to Malabar. We had to walk.

15. Soloman: And who do you think paid for it?...the logging company of course, so they could strip our forests bare and get the wood out the country as quickly as possible

16. Moses: But at least we can move around more easily.

17. Soloman: Perhaps, but by building new roads the logging companies are increasing the destruction of our forests.
18. Gladys: Soloman, how's that?
19. Soloman: Because all of a sudden people can access new areas. Our population is growing and people need more space, especially cattle famers who are looking for new areas to graze their livestock.
20. Monica: Look, you can see along the roadside. They're already burning small patches of land.
21. Soloman: Driver, stop here please...
- SFX: Vehicle slows to halt. Door opens X-fade into loud machinery**
22. Gladys: [Gasps] Look through the fence. It's bare!
- SFX_Walking across grass**
23. Soloman: The wood they're looking for is Mahogany. It's a hard wood found in Africa and South America. It's one of the most highly-prized trees on the world timber market. Furniture

made of Mahogany sells for a small fortune in Europe and America. Now the demand is increasing in China.

SFX_chainsaw and falling tree.

24. Solomon: That tree would have been hundreds of years old. The companies are supposed to select which trees they cut down leaving others standing. But instead they are operating on a very intensive scale. They are simply cutting everything and leave the ground bare.
25. Gladys: Don't they care that they are destroying the natural habitat of many animals, not to mention our living environment? ...
26. Solomon: No, I'm not sure they do. They are driven by profit. There are regulations that govern how the companies carry out their logging...
27. Moses: So why don't they follow them?
28. Solomon: Because often they are able to bribe local officials to turn a blind eye. Come, I want to show the damage the logging causes...

SFX_Walking through grasses

29. Monica: I've heard Soloman that logging damages the soil quality too.
30. Soloman: That's right. When you remove the vegetation from an area the soil is easily eroded.
31. Moses: What does that mean?
32. Soloman: You see trees and plants help hold the soil together when it rains. When you remove the vegetation the rainwater washes the topsoil away. In some parts of the continent, entire areas of a country are now unproductive.
33. Monica: And the soil, that remains, is a very poor quality, isn't it Soloman?
34. Soloman: Correct, Monica, it's far less fertile because it contains no nutrients.
35. Gladys: Last week I was down at the river, you know, the one that follows the valley below. And the water was a deep red, a bit like the colour of rust. Can we go back there?

SFX: Hum of agreement

SFX: walking through mud

36. Solomon: This is where the loggers were cutting down trees a year ago. Gladys, take a look at that!
37. Gladys: And the ground is totally bare...and look at this gully. It's so deep!
38. Solomon: That's where the water has run down the slop in torrents.
39. Moses: Yet over there, on the other side of the valley, the slopes are still thickly forested. Is my dad to blame for all this?
40. Solomon: No, Moses, not your dad. Too often these big companies take advantage of developing countries and their people. They're only interested in the timber. Your dad's probably not aware of the environmental consequences. But the company's executives are.

X-fade into SFX river water

41. Moses: I've never seen the river water this colour before...
42. Solomon: Moses, tell me when it last rained heavily.
43. Moses: Last night. There was a thunder storm, it woke me up.
44. Solomon: Exactly. The rain fell so hard it carried the mineral-rich top-soil down the hillside. Eventually it reached the river. Now the river is full of sediment and it's changing the colour of the water.
45. Gladys: My family used to farm near here. There's a lake just down the river...
46. Solomon: That right...
47. Gladys: And it used to have sparkling clear water...
48. Solomon: [Hum of agreement] I remember...
49. Gladys: It's so different now. It looks muddy...
50. Solomon: [sigh] You know the lake used to be more than 10 metres deep. Now it is just two metres deep.

51. Monica: Because it's filled with silt?
52. Solomon: Monica, I'm afraid so.
53. Gladys: Solomon, does it affect the fishing communities on the lake?
54. Solomon: Sure it does. The lake is effectively shrinking and so too are the fish populations.
55. Moses: Clearly though our timber is a valuable resource, and one which the developed countries want to get hold of. Is it possible to cut down the trees in a way that is not so environmentally damaging?
56. Solomon: Well we argue that logging can be sustainable if you take some but not all trees in a way that causes the least amount of harm. This allows the remaining trees to grow more vigorously and ensures the trees' roots hold the soil together.
57. Monica: And it means you preserve the habitat of animals!
58. Moses: Sustainable logging...sounds like the way forward

Music – 0:30

Did You Know? – Deforestation

Each year, Africa loses as much as 0.7 percent of its total forest cover. Some scientists say the figure is even higher. According to the United Nations, Africa lost the highest percentage of tropical forests during the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s of any continent. In total, some 23 million hectares of forest disappeared in the 1980s and 20 million hectares were lost in the 1990s.

The vast majority of Africa's tropical forests exist in West and Central Africa. When forests are cleared the amount of water that 'runs-off' of the surface dramatically increases because a greater proportion of the rain water reaches the ground. One study has shown that tropical forests can receive as much water in an hour as London can expect to receive in a wet month. The same study showed that a single storm has been measured as removing as much as 185 tonnes of topsoil per hectare. This is known as soil erosion. Erosion is defined simply as the removal of sediment, rock and soil from the landscape.

It is important to remember that erosion is an entirely natural process. It can, however, be un-naturally quickened by human activities. Logging is one such activity that directly impacts on the levels of soil erosion in sub-Saharan Africa. Water is what

scientists call the most significant ‘agent’ of erosion. In other words, water (in most cases rivers) carry more sediment from the land to the oceans every year than either ice or wind – the two other natural agents of erosion.

When natural, erosion is a slow, gradual process. But it can be sped up as we’ve heard by human activities such as logging. Sometimes, in extreme events, this results in large amounts of material being removed and the landscape is suddenly reshaped. Such events include landslides, which are frequent occurrences in countries where tropical downpours can quickly soak hillsides and years of deforestation mean there is little vegetation to help anchor and bind the soil. Without the layer of nutrient rich topsoil, the soil left beneath is infertile. That means that in the future it will take centuries for the forests to recover, leaving the landscape indelibly scarred for future generations.

Outro

And that’s all for today’s Learning By Ear special environment focus on deforestation, written by Richard Lough. Thanks for being with us and remember that you can find all of today’s programme online at www.dw-world.de/lbe. Good Bye.