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“Reconcile land system changes  
with planetary health”

## Colonial legacies and persisting global trade inequalities: The case of German - Cameroonian forestry since 1892

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### Abstract

Forest resources have been central to colonial trade, and colonial legacies remain key in determining who benefits from ongoing deforestation in the Global South today. Combining historical trade data with qualitative archival sources, this paper explores the enduring legacy of colonialism on global economic inequality, by tracing the historical evolution of forestry-related trade between Germany and Cameroon from 1892 to 2022. Drawing on dependency theory and historical institutionalism, we conceptualise colonial legacies as sector-specific path dependencies or “stickiness”, particularly in industries shaped during colonial rule. The research underscores the role of sectoral stickiness in trade and established financial actor structures in maintaining these disparities, challenging the conventional view that attributes global inequality solely to developing countries’ dependence on commodity exports to the Global North. Instead, it highlights how historically entrenched financial systems continue to favour former colonial elites, creating an uneven playing field for local interests. The findings suggest that addressing global inequality requires a shift in focus from merely addressing trade dependencies to dismantling the financial structures that continue to support former colonial powers. Meaningful decolonisation must involve not only political and cultural reckoning, but also the restructuring of global economic institutions and networks that perpetuate colonial-era privileges.