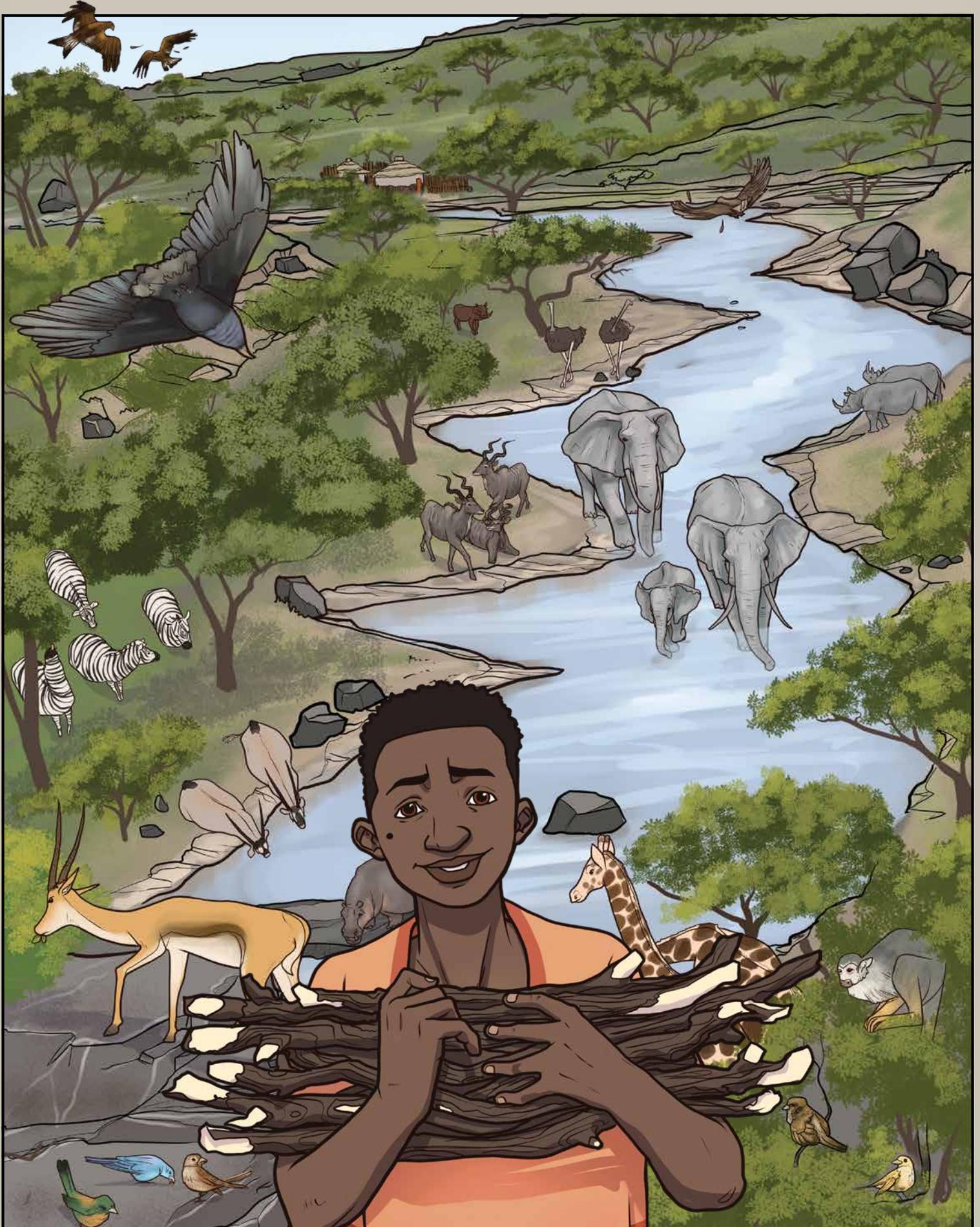
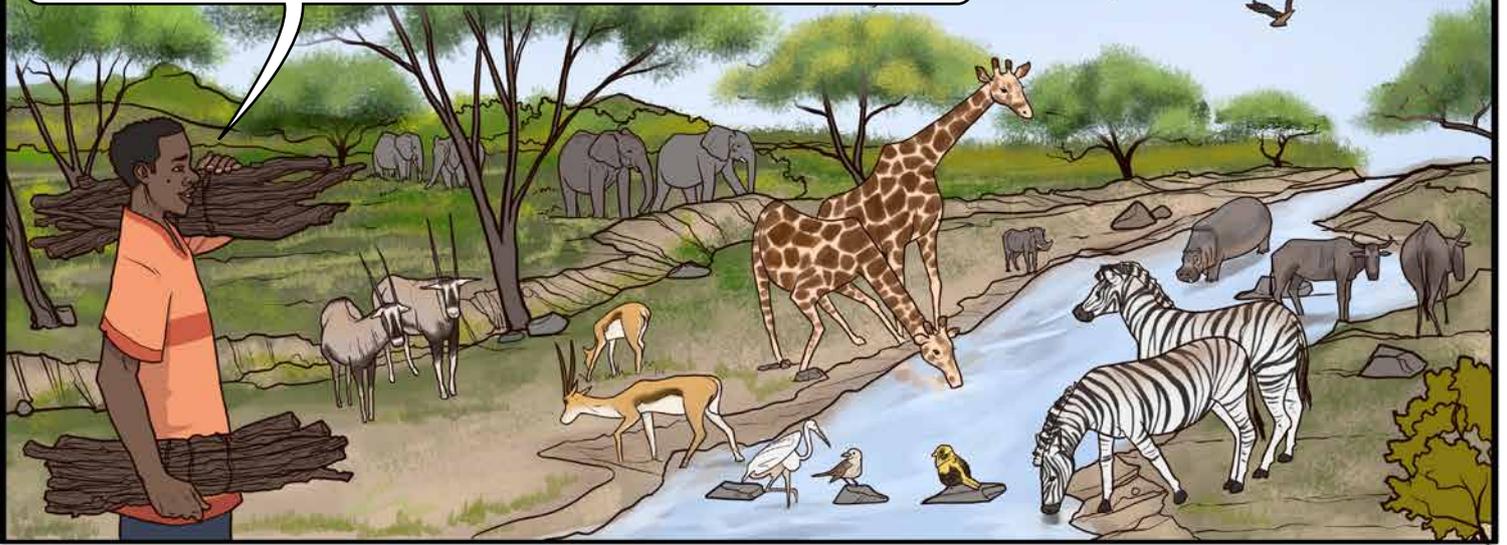


TIMBER TROUBLES

A Namibian Tale and the Fight for our Forests



I am glad that we live near a healthy forest where there are many kinds of animals and plants and we can collect firewood for cooking.



Oh no! What happened here? There are no trees here anymore. And all the firewood has also disappeared. Where must I collect the wood for cooking and keeping us warm tonight?



Oh no! This is bad! This is really bad!! Who would do such a thing? I wonder if grandpa knows about this.



Grandpa always tells us about his work as a Community Forest committee member. He always says that we are part of the circle of life and we must treat the forest and the animals with respect. He says that without the forest we cannot survive, so we have to use the forest produce in a way that allows it to live on, even after we have gone. This is called SUSTAINABILITY.



This is a terrible thing. People don't know that trees are special. They provide us with clean air and shade from the sun. We can also use some wood and leaves for shelter. Some people sell the fruits of trees or make art pieces from fallen branches to make an income without killing all the trees.



Wait a minute, what's that noise?

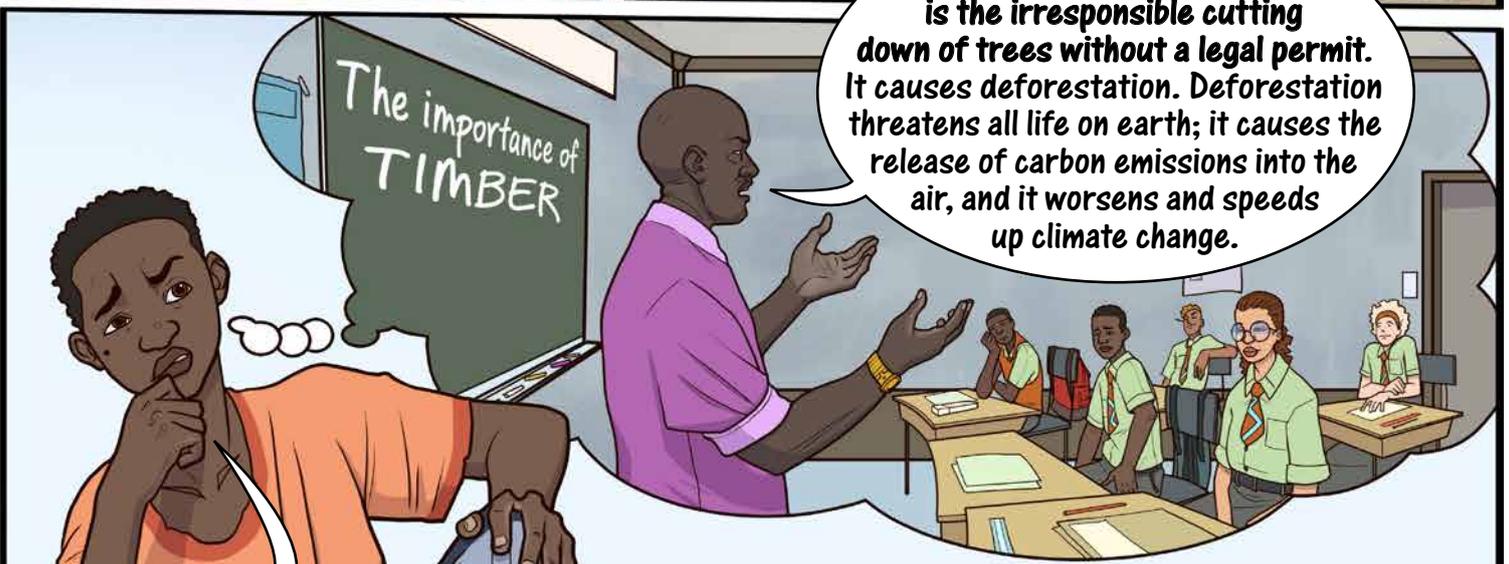


Who are these people? Why are they cutting down our trees? Did they not go to school? These trees are over 100 years old!

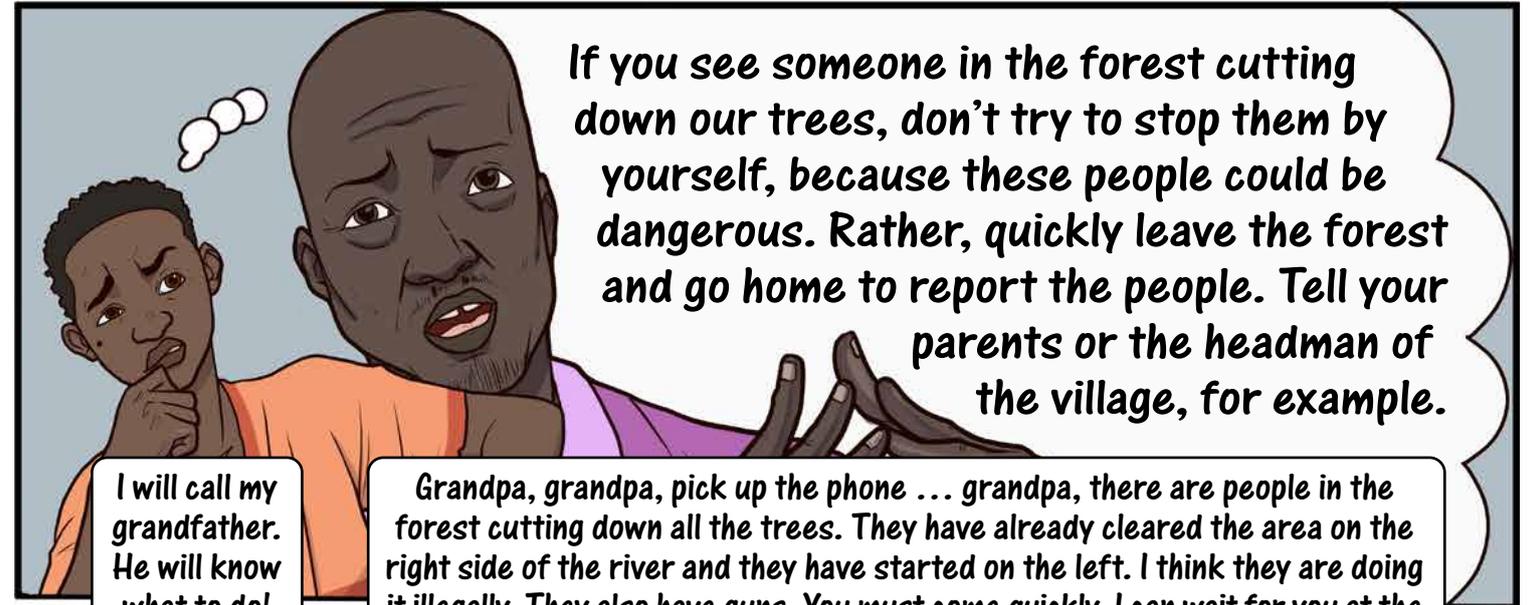


**ILLEGAL
TIMBER HARVESTING**
is the irresponsible cutting down of trees without a legal permit. It causes deforestation. Deforestation threatens all life on earth; it causes the release of carbon emissions into the air, and it worsens and speeds up climate change.

The importance of
TIMBER



This means that without trees, there is no clean air to breathe, the atmosphere heats up, there is less rain, and the ultimate result is deforestation. This will kill the natural habitat for animals and people.



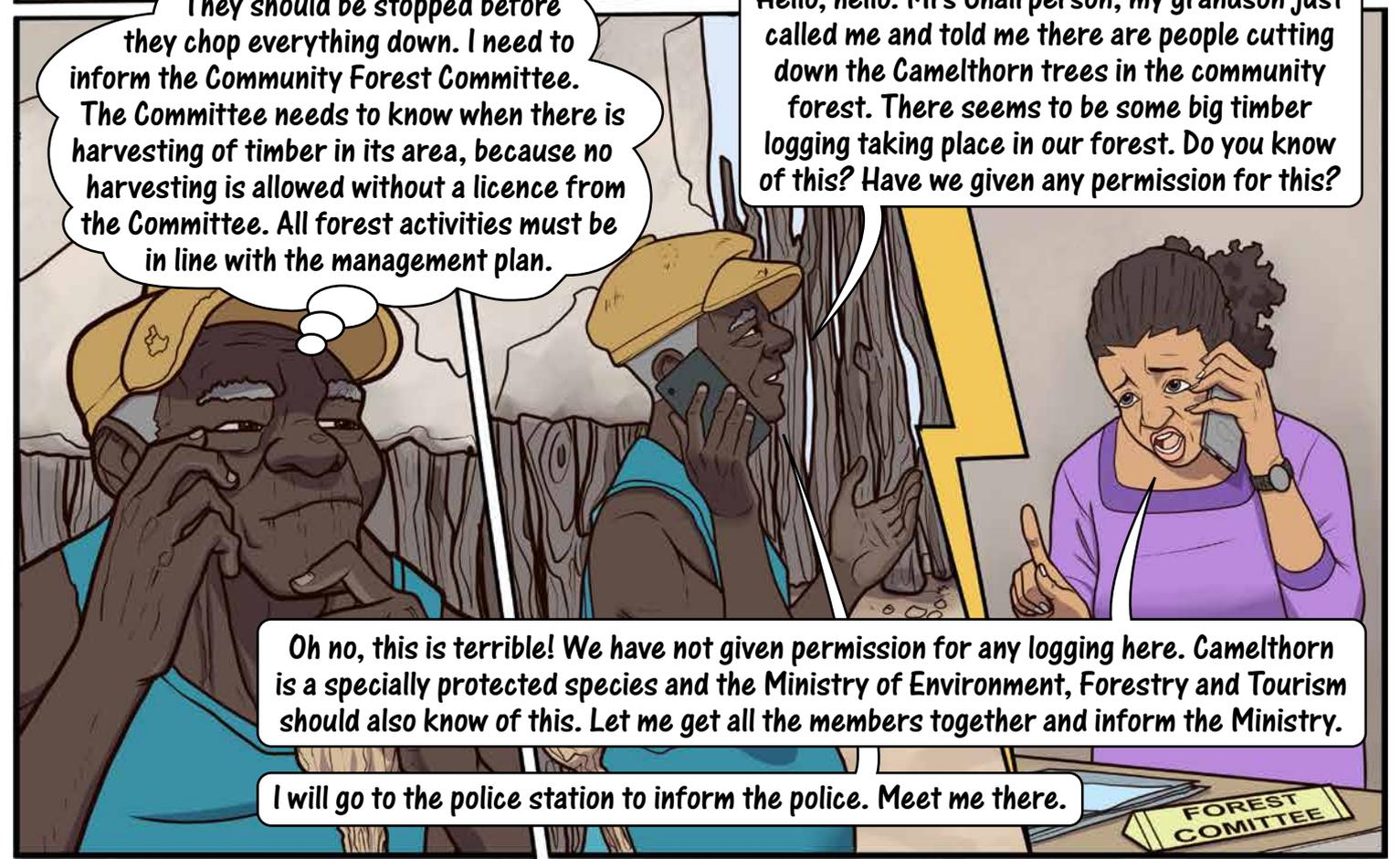
If you see someone in the forest cutting down our trees, don't try to stop them by yourself, because these people could be dangerous. Rather, quickly leave the forest and go home to report the people. Tell your parents or the headman of the village, for example.

I will call my grandfather. He will know what to do!

Grandpa, grandpa, pick up the phone ... grandpa, there are people in the forest cutting down all the trees. They have already cleared the area on the right side of the river and they have started on the left. I think they are doing it illegally. They also have guns. You must come quickly. I can wait for you at the north side of the forest gate to show you where they are cutting the trees.



I am coming, but you must get out of there and rather meet me at the police station. I will get the chairperson of the forest committee.



They should be stopped before they chop everything down. I need to inform the Community Forest Committee. The Committee needs to know when there is harvesting of timber in its area, because no harvesting is allowed without a licence from the Committee. All forest activities must be in line with the management plan.

Hello, hello. Mrs Chairperson, my grandson just called me and told me there are people cutting down the Camelthorn trees in the community forest. There seems to be some big timber logging taking place in our forest. Do you know of this? Have we given any permission for this?

Oh no, this is terrible! We have not given permission for any logging here. Camelthorn is a specially protected species and the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism should also know of this. Let me get all the members together and inform the Ministry.

I will go to the police station to inform the police. Meet me there.

FOREST COMMITTEE



Let's go to the forest. We have a few police in two cars and the committee members together with the boy in two other cars.



The two of you. Stop!! What are you doing?

We are harvesting some firewood for our own use.

What are you talking about? You are cutting down far more trees than you are allowed to cut for your own use. Look, this is more than 1 tonne of wood.



Also, these are Camelthorn trees. They are a specially protected species and you need a special permit from the Ministry to harvest them! Do you know what you have done? You have destroyed this part of our forest. This is not sustainable harvesting. All you think about is yourself!

Where are your permits? Who gave you permission to cut these trees? Who are you working for? We will have to confiscate the logs and your chainsaw and keep them as evidence in your trial.





You have all now been charged for illegal timber harvesting under the Forest Act of 2001. You have the right to legal representation.



Where are these buggers? Why are they not picking up the phone?



Your men were caught red-handed. They have been taken to the police station.

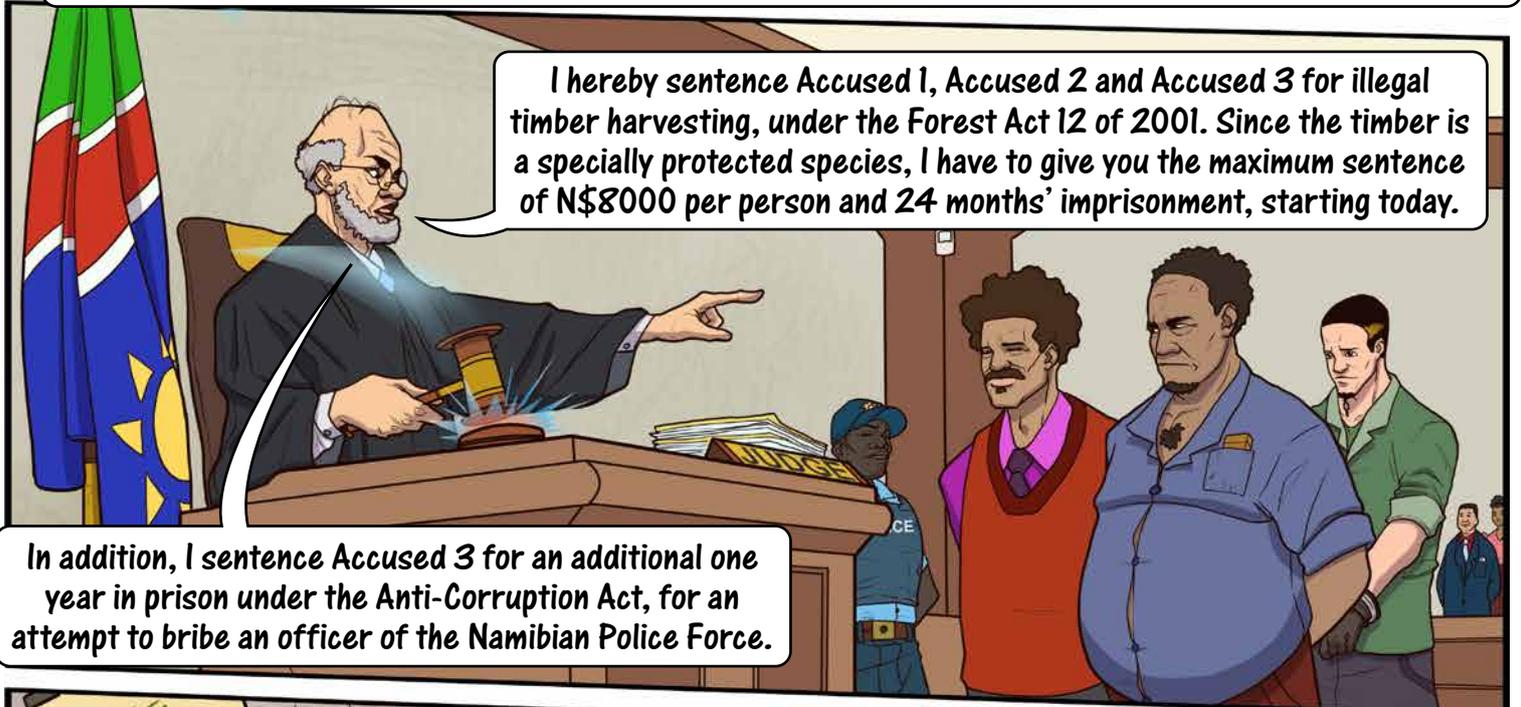


Look here Sir, this is not difficult, man. Just withdraw the matter and I can provide for you lekker. Just say how much you want - I know you don't get a very big salary! Just release the boys and make this case go away and I will pay you well.



Hey wena! Now I have to arrest you too and charge you for attempting to bribe me. I am an officer of the Namibian Police Force. I have a duty to do what is legal! You offering me money to do otherwise is bribery and it is against the law.

Clearly you are a part of this illegal activity, so I will also charge you as an accomplice for working with these thieves and for harvesting timber products **WITHOUT** permission. In addition, I will charge you under the Anti-Corruption Act for attempting to bribe an officer of the court. You will explain yourself in court!



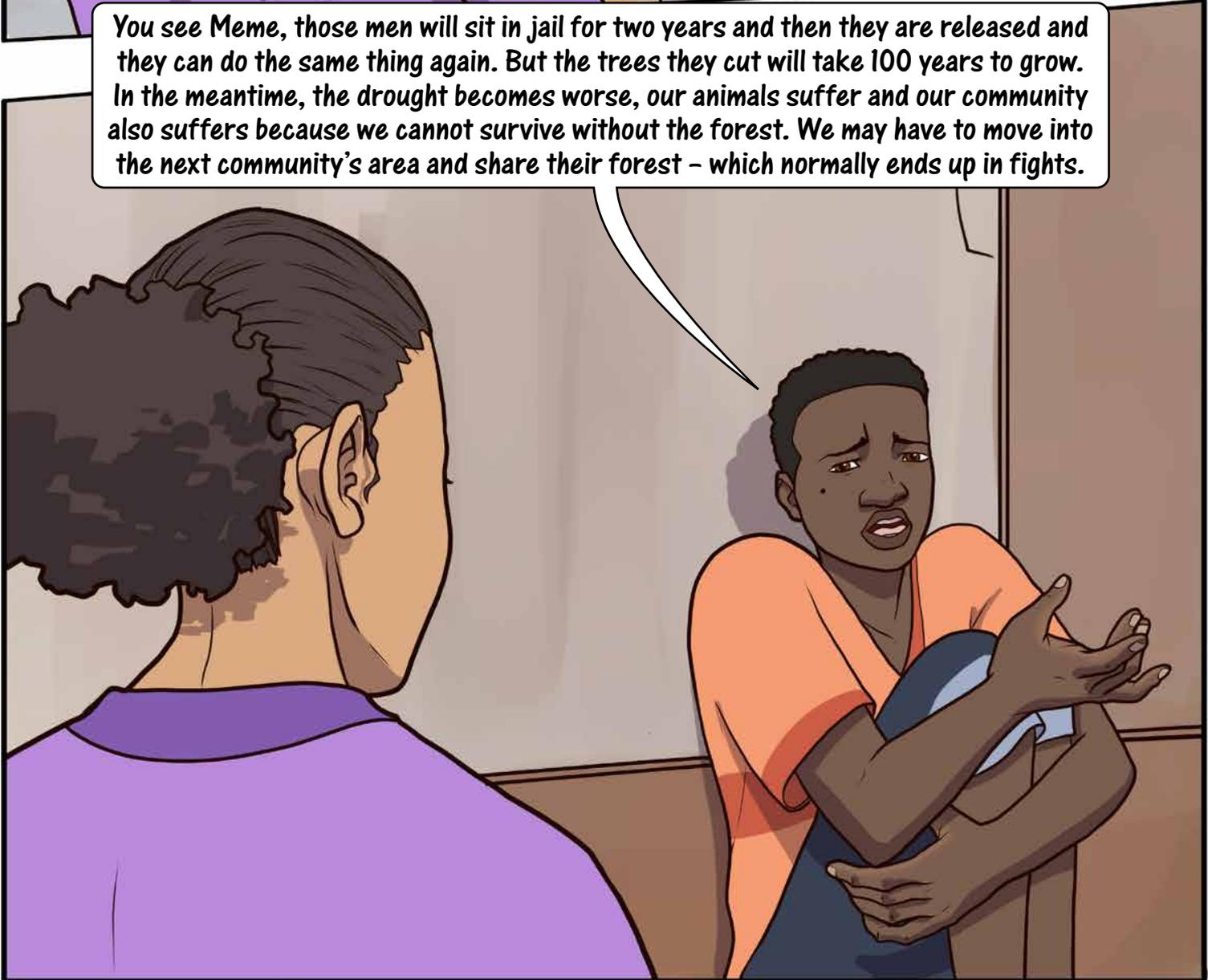
I hereby sentence Accused 1, Accused 2 and Accused 3 for illegal timber harvesting, under the Forest Act 12 of 2001. Since the timber is a specially protected species, I have to give you the maximum sentence of N\$8000 per person and 24 months' imprisonment, starting today.

In addition, I sentence Accused 3 for an additional one year in prison under the Anti-Corruption Act, for an attempt to bribe an officer of the Namibian Police Force.





What's wrong with you Bingwe? You must be happy. You did a very good thing reporting the thieves. You were brave and your quick response made it possible to catch the thieves in their tracks and now they will be locked up for two years.



You see Meme, those men will sit in jail for two years and then they are released and they can do the same thing again. But the trees they cut will take 100 years to grow. In the meantime, the drought becomes worse, our animals suffer and our community also suffers because we cannot survive without the forest. We may have to move into the next community's area and share their forest - which normally ends up in fights.

And besides, you see, amongst all those trees that have been cut, there was one very special tree that my grandfather and I liked to sit under, and he would tell me stories about my great-grandmother and our traditions. She was special to our community and she was buried under that specific tree. Every first moon in the cold season, the whole community camps under that specific tree, singing and dancing until the sun comes up. You see we believe that our ancestors live amongst us even when they have been buried.

Yes, you are correct, son. These thieves have no respect for people like us who depend on the forest and have many cultural ties with the forest.



We cannot allow this to happen again! But what can we as a community do to stop these criminals?



What can you and Bingwe do to stop illegal timber harvesting?

1

Take illegal timber harvesting seriously!

Communities should feel a sense of ownership and pride in the intact ecosystem, including forests.

Assist law enforcement by keeping your eyes and ears open.

Be prepared to act when you see a forest crime being committed.

As a society, we need to let the criminals know that all forest crimes are serious crimes. Our future depends on the existence of healthy forests and sustainable forest management.

Create awareness among your community members!

2

DO NOT TAKE ACTION without reporting to a law-enforcement agent first!

The vast majority of forest crimes are committed by organised crime syndicates.

They operate without respecting your rights, your community's rights or anybody else's rights.

Therefore, it is imperative that any action you take concerning illegal timber loggers involves at least one law-enforcement institution, such as the Namibian Police Force.

gal activities in your community forest?

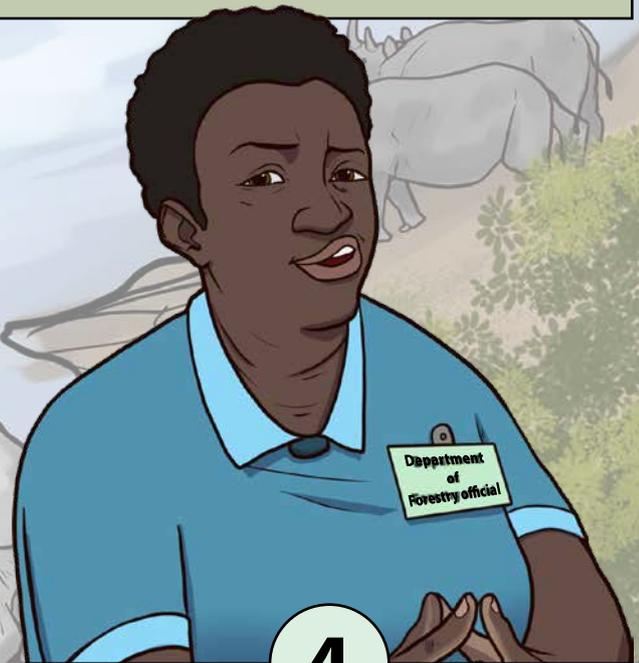


Join or start an action group.

An action group is a group of people with a common purpose – like fighting against illegal timber harvesting – who come together to accomplish a specific task. They normally have a goal to stop an activity by doing something like lobbying or going to court. They would also have to create a voluntary body by way of a constitution. (Ask your teacher and always get your parents' permission to do this.)

Standing up for the environment through activism and protecting our rights through advocacy is a very important step. For instance, if plans to develop the forest area are being considered in your locality and they may have an impact on the environment and the community's right to use the natural resources, it is your right to be consulted about the activities, so that any concerns that you have will be heard. No one can force you to consent to such activities.

If your action group's protests or activities are well recognised, the group may have the opportunity to speak to decision-makers and influence their actions to accord with your needs. A group like this can even go to court.



Use the legal system.

If illegal timber harvesting is taking place in your community, report the incident to the Department of Forestry at the nearest offices of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, and lay a charge at the nearest police station. If the incident is taken up by the courts, your community has the option to recover some of the lost resources (the timber or the value of the timber auctioned off).

File complaints of bribery with the Anti-Corruption Commission, and/or report the matter to the Office of the Ombudsman.

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If you are uncertain about any of the above, contact the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) for guidance – see the last page of this comic for contact details.

This comic is based on the comic submitted by **GABRIEL VOLOMBOLA** and **SIMEON HANGULA**, under the mentorship of Ms Ester Alfeus, Keetmanshoop Suiderlig High School, for the LAC schools comic competition in 2022.



This comic is intended to inspire and motivate you to know your rights and to protect Namibia's environment. This will help us to reach our goals of reducing climate impact in our country and preserving our forests for future generations.



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An electronic version of this comic is available on the LAC website: www.lac.org.na.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE CENTRE
P.O. Box 604, Windhoek, Namibia
Telephone: 061-223356
Email: info@lac.org.na

Text:

CORINNA VAN WYK and HANS-CHRISTIAN MAHNKE

Illustrations, design and layout:

TAFY TANG ARTS and PERRI CAPLAN

Printing:

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