
Brazil: FSC greenwashing of eucalyptus plantations is strongly questioned and a warning made vis-à-vis their advance in Piauí

One year ago, Judson Barros, Coordinator of the Piauí Environmental Network stated that “the south of Piauí has been destroyed, its rivers and streams poisoned to satisfy the voraciousness of some companies that seek easy profit through the destruction of ecosystems, with their coal, soybean, timber, castor-oil and eucalyptus activities. The wealth produced remains in the hands of a few people, while most of the population continues living but not enjoying the assets offered for free by Mother Nature. Family farming hardly exists any more. None of the towns where soybeans, castor plants, timber or coal are present have shown changes in their social profiles. Rural workers die from poison and the State pretends not to notice that the workforce is based on slave labour, biodiversity is implacably destroyed, the waters of the Cerrado (Brazilian savannah) are disappearing and deserts are being created.” (1)

To make matters even worse, the pulp and paper company Suzano has appeared on the scene. It is encroaching on the Atlantic Forest, on the banks of the River Paranaíba and on the Cerrado, where it has received authorization to establish monoculture eucalyptus plantations covering 160,000 hectares. Of course, the company has also brought with it many promises of jobs: between 12 and 30 thousand indirect jobs and 3,500 direct ones...”

“This discourse was used when Bunge Foods and Brasil Ecodiesel settled in Piauí”, reflected Barros, adding: “Today the situation is cruel, no jobs are being created, the factory has been closed down as the government discovered that cars can’t run on castor-oil.” But only after having put a lot of public money into the business. The Governor gave 100,000 hectares of public land to this company, worth approximately 50 million Brazilian Reais. Is the destruction of the environment justifiable because it is going to generate some jobs? They try to instil in the people that because of these jobs, society must passively accept the destruction of entire forests in the neighbourhood of Teresina [the capital of Piauí], completely eliminating the fauna and flora, contributing to increase the heat and lack of rain in the region and transforming the Paranaíba into a gutter, worse than it is already. The water supply in the capital in terms of quality and availability will also be seriously impaired.”

The examples of what is going to happen are plentiful, in spite of the trite promises. As stated in an open letter sent to the FSC national and international offices and those of the certifying company IMAFLORA disseminated on 10 July (2), “For a decade now the Green Desert Network has been warning Brazilian and international society about the profound and negative impacts of monoculture eucalyptus plantations on society, on the economy and on the environment in the extreme south of Bahia, the north of Espírito Santo and in Minas Gerais, denouncing the lack of sustainability of chemical and industrial eucalyptus plantations. Furthermore, the Green Desert Network has mobilized a significant segment of regional society, giving rise to a series of public hearings in municipal, state and federal parliaments and also to legal proceedings, even brought before international courts, in which the State and monoculture plantations are made responsible for the violation of economic, social, cultural and environmental human rights.”

Social, peasant, landless and traditional peoples' movements, workers' unions, churches, non-governmental organizations, technicians, academics and individuals participating in the Alert against the Green Desert Network have denounced that the agrochemicals used in eucalyptus plantations "since the seventies and until today have polluted the soil and the water in a macro-region, their lands have overlapped traditional ethnic territories, their mechanization has generated large-scale unemployment, their industrial pollution has affected an enormous territory, their trucks and facilities have disrupted rural highways and communities, their outsourcing and degradation of labour have mutilated and poisoned workers, while disability pensions have not been conquered. Their management of monoculture plantations has generated food insecurity and the concentration of land in a territory showing high rural exodus, a lack of Agrarian Reform and public policies and with no deeds for traditional territories."

In spite of all this, Suzano's monoculture eucalyptus plantations have been granted FSC certification, through the Imafloa certifying company. The Alert against the Green Desert Network states in its press release that the FSC seal "certifies and greenwashes as sustainable this social and environmental tragedy instead of contributing to reduce social, economic and environmental inequality in the region."

The issue of certification of harmful monoculture tree plantations is something that has already been suffered by the communities that resist them. Veracel was certified in the extreme south of Bahia, Plantar was certified in Minas Gerais and now, Suzano has been certified. As the Networks states in its open letter "Unfortunately FSC's principle 10 continues to go against the flow in the environmental debate, granting certification of uniform tree plantations as sustainable forests and misrepresenting the message of the green label to the consumers from the North."

It is precisely these consumers who should know that "For us, the Green Desert Network, the FSC for the Suzano Company has been a greenwashing of a company that would not even be financially sustainable if it were not for the enormous and advantageous public moneys invested by the State, under the form of direct investment, credit or tax concessions. The Suzano Company's green seal should be revised immediately and withdrawn, enabling the granting of deeds to traditional territories, peasant farming and the agrarian reform, promoting agro-ecology, food sovereignty and the recovery of the climate and the Atlantic Forest in the region."

They finally conclude that "devastating companies deserve FSC and FSC deserves the devastating companies! Those who do not deserve FSC are the peasant, landless communities, the *Quilombolas* (slave descendents), the indigenous and riparian peoples and the neighbouring peoples, hit by these plantations. Neither do the final consumers in the North, interested in revising their excessive consumption, deserve FSC."

All the false promises that Suzano is now making in Piauí – such as the 12 to 30 thousand indirect jobs and the 3,500 direct ones – have been made before in Espírito Santo and Bahia, but now it is known that their eucalyptus plantations not only did not generate jobs but resulted in massive unemployment. As the Green Desert Network stated in its letter of 10 July "the socio-environmental disputes throbbing in the north of Espírito Santo and in the extreme south of Bahia, arising from the installation of thousands of hectares of monoculture plantations, are about to occur in the states of Maranhão and Piauí". Considering that Suzano's plantations in Piauí are still at the environmental impact assessment stage, it is essential for the local inhabitants to know that all the company's promises are false and that they are still on time to avoid the social and environmental disaster that will be caused by the establishment of these plantations.

(1) “O papelão da Suzano no Piauí”, Judson Barros – Coordinator of the “Rede Ambiental do Piauí”, http://www.portaldomeioambiente.org.br/pma/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=717

(2) Press Release by the Alert against the Green Desert Network, 10 July 2009