
Brazil: Plantar's eucalyptus plantations, carbon credits and local people

A letter with over 50 signatures from Brazilian NGOs, churches, movements and trade unions was sent to investors of the World Bank's Prototype Carbon Fund (PCF) on 26 March 2003, urging them not to buy carbon credits from the controversial Plantar project in Minas Gerais, Brazil. The letter (available at www.sinkswatch.org, also see WRM Bulletin 65) states that Plantar is neither clean nor sustainable development, that the company has continuously violated labour laws, and does not possess an EIA, though required according to the law.

In a letter dated 11 April 2003 to the PCF, Plantar refutes all criticism and concerns raised in the NGO letter, accusing WRM and the Brazilian organization FASE-ES of "tremendous lack of knowledge or understanding."

Plantar fails to acknowledge that the letter is based on in-depth investigation of the company's operations, carried out by members of FASE-ES, and documented in a report commissioned by WRM. This investigation included visits to the area as well as extensive interviews with local residents and is available at <https://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/certifying-the-uncertifiable-fsc-certification-of-tree-plantations-in-thailand-and-brazil>

As could have been expected, the company reacted by denying all the research findings and initiated a campaign at the local level, including absurdities such as claiming that "NGO's from Espírito Santo and Uruguay work for rising unemployment in the town of Curvelo" (Folha de Curvelo Newspaper, April 16, 2003). The article's subtitle states that "supported by international interests, Non Governmental Organizations elaborate erroneous report against Plantar S/A and try to block resources that would be invested in the town of Curvelo."

In view of Plantar's reaction, both FASE-ES and the WRM decided to turn down the company's invitation to meet together, and to visit instead the plantation area and listen to local residents affected by the plantations. The decision was reinforced by the fact that in his last message Luiz Carlos Goulart --the company's Sustainable Development Manager-- informed that it would not be possible to visit Plantar's plantations --alleging lack of time-- and that the meeting would be held at the company's offices. The meeting with the company thus became senseless.

The FASE/WRM representatives visited the area on May 15 and met with local people. The overall impact of the company's operations were summarized by a local woman who simply said: "Plantar finished with all we had." The meaning of that was made very clear to us by the local people that showed us around the area. Within the plantations, the only thing green were the eucalyptus saplings and trees. The rest was brown, resulting from the widespread application of the herbicide glyphosate (Round-up). The water had either dried up or had been contaminated with agromechemicals, thus depriving local people with the fish they used to catch and eat. Local fauna --which constituted an important element for people's livelihoods-- had also disappeared, making the "hunting and fishing prohibited" sign posts a mockery. Hunt and fish what --said an angry local man-- if the company has killed everything?

Local people also informed about Plantar's pressure to get people to sign on to a letter of support for the company, where only people not working with or depending on the company were able --at their own risk-- to refuse signing. They also showed us the public road which the company had closed, forcing them to travel a much longer distance to reach their homes. The alleged reason for the decision to close the road, adopted with no consultation with local residents, was to avoid the dust coming from the road affecting the plants grown in the company's tree nursery!

The visit to the area simply confirmed the FASE researchers' findings and strengthened the conviction the company should neither receive FSC certification nor should it be considered within the Prototype Carbon Fund as a possible candidate for receiving carbon credits in the framework of the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism.