
Colombia: monoculture tree plantations promoted in the Andes

As in a number of other countries, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is now promoting the development of pulpwood plantations in Colombia. The bank has recently approved a "non-reimbursable" loan of 2 million dollars --through the Multilateral Investment Fund-- to support the creation of a Training and Technological Development Centre for the Pulp, Paper and Cardboard Industry (CENPAPEL).

According to journalistic reports, the objective of this centre is to find alternatives for pulp production in view of the depletion of appropriate and abundant pulpwood resources from native forests. It will be located in Pereira, home of the country's two main paper companies (Papeles Nacionales and Colpapel). The project had been presented four years ago to the IDB by a group of entrepreneurs from Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Peru and receives support from Pereira's local government and from the Risaralda government

Additionally, the Organization of American States will also provide financial support to the project and had previously paved the way for the participation of foreign companies, establishing contact with 25 such firms, of which six are already participating.

Given that the stated aim of this project is to find alternative raw material for the pulp industry, it is no secret to local populations that this will mean the establishment of large-scale eucalyptus and pine plantations in the region.

In such situation, local environmentalists are organizing a regional meeting to support local peasants, based on the analysis of the impacts that commercial pine and eucalyptus crops will have on the Andean biodiversity and on soils and water.

Source: Margarita Florez, ILSA, Colombia