
[The invisible Nordic countries' footprint](#)

Sweden, Finland and Norway rarely appear in the media. At least not in relation with the North's footprint in the South and even less so in deforestation-related matters. The US, Canada, Japan and many West European countries usually dominate the headlines. And they certainly deserve it, since corporations based in those countries are actively extracting ever increasing resources from the South and destroying the local and global environment in the process. As a result of their activities, those countries are directly or indirectly responsible for most deforestation processes occurring throughout the world.

On the other hand, Nordic countries enjoy a good press regarding their environmental and social performance at home and government delegates appear to be among the most serious and well-intentioned participants at intergovernmental processes aimed at forest conservation.

However, neither Nordic companies nor governments are that innocent and truly deserve a share of the headlines, particularly in the forestry area. Finland, Norway and Sweden are actively promoting the spread of large-scale fast-growing tree monocultures in the South, which are resulting in a large and increasing number of social and environmental impacts, among which deforestation.

Finland is home of Jaakko Poyry, the largest forestry and engineering consulting company in the world, with an estimated 40 per cent of the forest industry consultancy market worldwide. Poyry, which absorbed the large Swedish consulting firm Interforest, has over 60 offices in 25 countries around the world, and has been involved in hundreds of major commercial forestry and pulp and paper projects in the last two decades across the Americas, Africa, Asia, Oceania and Europe. Many forestry "Master Plans" in the South have been master-planned by Jaakko Poyry and most of them involve large-scale tree monocultures and associated pulp mills.

Norway has jumped on the bandwagon of carbon forestry and the Norwegian company Tree Farms has already started a project in Uganda to set up between 80,000 and 100,000 hectares of plantations of pines and eucalyptus to act as "sinks" for Norway's emissions of CO₂. The Tree Farms project has provoked the eviction of some 8,000 people from 13 villages -mainly farmers and fisherfolk- from their lands, that the company is now occupying, condemning them to poverty due to the loss of their livelihoods, and creating a source of social and environmental conflicts.

Sweden and Finland host Stora Enso, which -among its many other activities in the South- is a major shareholder of Veracel, a company acting in the state of Bahia in Brazil. Veracel owns 160,000 hectares of land, much of which being covered with eucalyptus. As the company's own web page says "Veracel's eucalyptus plantations are vast and concentrated, thereby producing low-cost pulpwood." But it doesn't say anything about the high social and environmental costs of the company's tree plantations and of those belonging to the other two pulp industries located in the same region. (Aracruz and Bahia Sul) Those costs have been so high, that they have led to the creation of the "Movement against the Green Desert in Espirito Santo and Bahia", a broad-based coalition working to halt the spread of further plantations in the region (for more details see article on Brazil below).

The above is only a small sample of the type of forestry-related activities being carried out and promoted by Nordic companies in the South, which themselves help other investments of other companies from the same countries (e.g. Ahlstrom, Valmet-Tampella, Kvaerner Pulping, Sunds Defibrator and others), many of which subsidized and supported by official Export Credit and "aid" agencies (see examples in the article on Thailand below).

But while highlighting the Nordic countries' negative impacts in the South, it is necessary to also underscore the active role played by Nordic NGOs in assisting Southern peoples in their struggles against those companies, particularly by creating awareness within their own countries about the impacts that people are not aware of and about which their governments and companies don't inform. This type of North-South support is essential and shows the way forward to a future world governed by solidarity and respect for nature.