# Brazil: Fisher-folk affected by Aracruz Celulose close the company's private port

A pulp mill seriously alters the micro-region where it is installed and generates a series of problems that mainly affect traditional peoples.

Aracruz Celulose S.A. (ARCEL) built the Barra do Riacho unit in the State of Espirito Santo in a place that had previously been the site of the indigenous village of Macacos. The building of this pulp mill attracted a large number of workers from other regions and states, causing much disruption in the neighbourhood of Barra do Riacho, which was basically a fishing community located one kilometre away from the mill. The neighbourhood suddenly grew from 900 to 10,000 inhabitants and today, Barra do Riacho still suffers from the consequences: a high rate of unemployment, child prostitution and drug trafficking.

Added to this is the fact that in order to guarantee enough water to supply the enormous consumption needed for the production of pulp – a demand equivalent to the consumption of water in a city of over 2 million inhabitants – ARCEL closed the outlet to the sea of the River Riacho, diverting it in addition to four other rivers in the region, thus resulting in sedimentation.

This caused enormous damage to the Barra do Riacho and Barra do Sahy fisher-folk, who have repeatedly insisted that ARACEL address their legitimate demands, but are persistently ignored by the company.

Finally on 10 October 2008, over 100 fisher-folk from the Fisher-folk's Association of the Barra do Riacho and Barra do Sahy, closed for the whole day access by land to the port of Portocel, ARCEL's private port preventing the entry of pulp for export.

The fisher-folk submitted a long list of claims to the company and to the Municipality of Aracruz. Among these claims the main one demands "the immediate opening up of the four water-gates built [by ARCEL] on the river [Riacho] to increase its volume of water, as this has decreased the amount of water in the river, causing sedimentation and the blocking [by a growing sand dune] of the river's exit to the sea."

The closure of the river mouth has left the families of fisher-folk in a desperate situation because it prevents their boats going out (and returning) to high sea, making subsistence increasingly difficult for these people who depend on fishing. On the other hand, the vessels loaded with pulp to produce disposable paper in Europe, the US and Asia have not stopped leaving the port of Portocel.

The fisher-folk demanded the presence of the city mayor, Ademar Devens, who visited the site and on observing the situation of the river mouth, decided to take the fisher-folk's claims to the company. The company informed the fisher-folk that it was prepared to open the four water gates on the Riacho River provided the tide went down, in the understanding that this would facilitate the opening of the river mouth.

With the promise of opening the water gates, the fisher-folk decided to withdraw until the result of a forthcoming meeting with the municipality and the company, during which the situation would be assessed and other claims would be discussed. Based on these results they would decide whether to take further action. They are tired of promises and measures that do not solve the problem.

It is ironic that the company asked for the fisher-folk's "comprehension" of the difficulties they are facing: lack of water at the mill due to a prolonged drought in the region – a situation made worse by the company's own eucalyptus plantations - and a "difficult financial situation" due to the increase in the dollar rate – although it is public knowledge that ARCEL undertook financial operations of a speculative nature, resulting in losses amounting to millions of dollars.

And what about some understanding for the fisher-folk and the distressing situation in which they have been left on not being able to fish and address their basic needs?

Article based on information from: "Pescadores fecham porto de exportação da Aracruz Celulose"(Fisher-folk close Aracruz Celulose's export port), Winnie Overbeek, Rede Alerta contra o Deserto Verde, sent by the author, e-mail: woverbeek@terra.com.br; "Promises of jobs and destruction of work. The case of Aracruz Celulose in Brazil", by Alacir De'Nadai, Winfridus Overbeek, Luiz Alberto Soares, 2005, http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/fase.pdf