
Brazil: The CERFLOR certification programme does not deserve the slightest credibility

The Brazilian CERFLOR certification programme, endorsed by the international PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes), was officially launched in 2002 by the Ministry of Development, Industry and Trade and started to operate in March 2003.

CERFLOR is based on five principles – accompanied by criteria and indicators – that vary according to local conditions. Much emphasis is placed on management plans, monitoring exercises and development plans for the local communities, but no minimum and clear social and environmental requirements exist with regards to performance. The social requisites do not go beyond those demanded by law. There are no requirement regarding self determination of the Indigenous Peoples and no representatives of NGOs or indigenous or local groups participate in the preparation of CERFLOR standards.

Beyond the principles, criteria and indicators, what is important is to see how it performs in concrete cases. In this respect, the case of the certification of Aracruz Celulose is amply revealing. In fact, CERFLOR has certified “forest management” of all Aracruz’ plantations in the States of Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, Bahia and Espirito Santo.

It is interesting to point out that in the case of the plantations of this company in Rio Grande do Sul, conflict over lands with the indigenous communities of the distant State of Espirito Santo generated so much discredit that the company itself decided to request voluntary withdrawal of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification from its plantations in the State of Rio Grande do Sul before revalidation in December this year (see WRM Bulletin No. 107). These same plantations have now been granted CERFLOR certification.

The case of Aracruz plantations in Espirito Santo is even more serious. In this state the company owns 146,000 hectares of land, 93 thousand of which are covered with monoculture eucalyptus plantations. Certification of these plantations by CERFLOR would seem provocative to all those who have a close knowledge of the situation and position of the companies’ managers towards the local communities and their environment over the past 35 years.

The Alert against the Green Desert Network, quotes some of the examples of conflicts, some going further back in time, some more recent:

“Aracruz Celulose continues to occupy approximately 10.500 hectares of Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous lands in the Municipality of Aracruz. They are lands that were recognized as indigenous by the Federal Government, although they were excluded from the last demarcation made in 1998. At that time, the Federal Government, under pressure from Aracruz Celulose, committed illegal action on reducing the amount of land allocated for demarcation. The question is then how can a company be certified that occupies and exploits indigenous land?

Aracruz Celulose invaded the lands of the Quilombolas (the descendents of runaway African slaves)

in the north of the State of Espírito Santo, evicting thousands of people and planting eucalyptus trees. Over the past few years, 34 Quilombola communities have launched a process of re-articulation and reorganization to guarantee recognition, devolution and demarcation of their lands, with the support of the Palmares Foundation, INCRA (the National Institute for Settlements and Agrarian Reform) and organized civil society.

Even so, CERFLOR certified a company that occupies and exploits Quilombola community lands. The inhabitants of Vila do Riacho who used to make charcoal from waste eucalyptus from Aracruz, had their ovens destroyed in an action linking the City government of Aracruz, the local police and Aracruz company 'armed militia' Visel. Eucalyptus waste, - remains of branches and trunks – were the only source of survival for the communities deprived of their traditional way of life. Presently the company is considered environmentally sound because it has a machine that grinds all this waste to become organic matter to be returned to the earth. All that remains is for Aracruz to win an environmental prize for this... Now, how can a company be certified that deprives landless families, Quilombolas and Indians of their only source of survival, making them go hungry?

In October 2004, Aracruz destroyed four houses belonging to inhabitants of the Barra do Riacho area, near its industrial complex. Following the destruction of the houses, it became evident in court that the families had been living there for over 10 years. Aracruz brutally destroyed their houses, and pulled up their banana, manioc and pineapple plantations. Is this a company that deserves to receive a forest management certification while it continues with its acts of violence against the local inhabitants, just as it has done against the Indians, Quilombolas and small farmers throughout the last 35 years, even with the support of the military dictatorship? ”

The organizations, movements, communities and civil society citizens consider that CERFLOR does not deserve the least credibility. Civil society was explicitly excluded from the discussion on the objectives, principles and criteria in this certification system. As denounced by the Alert against the Green Desert Network: “To date we do not know what the principles and criteria the BVQI certifying company will use in this certification process and if we want to know them then we must purchase the documentation concerning the certification procedure established by CERFLOR, which characterizes it as lacking transparency. Furthermore, there are no minimum social or environmental requirements related with the CERFLOR certification. The reference is basically Brazilian legislation.” .

But, as pointed out by the Alert against the Green Desert Network “a large-scale monoculture plantation can never be certified as it is unsustainable. Eucalyptus plantations are only “sustainable” for Aracruz, which increases its productivity at the cost of high consumption and contamination of water resources, the death of fish and other animals and so many other environmental impacts involving Indigenous, Quilombola and small farming communities that have always inhabited the region which has now become known as the Green Desert. Their way of life has been changed to benefit Aracruz, with the destruction of the Mata Atlantica forest, thus eliminating these communities' source of true sustainability.

The local communities are tired of the negative impacts caused by monoculture eucalyptus plantations. They want alternatives based on the production of food from the land through a wide-sweeping Agrarian Reform, they want reforestation with species improving the local environment and offering multiple use options, the Indians and Quilombolas want their lands back and, above all, they all want their fundamental rights to be respected. .

The Alert against the Green Desert Network denounces CERFLOR and its technical team, in charge of preparing a report for the certification of Aracruz Celulose in the State of Espírito Santo. With no

prior communication, this team accompanied by two Aracruz Celulose officials appeared in the Guarani village of Boa Esperança on 30/11/04, interrupting a meeting of the Commission of Tupinikim Guarani Chiefs and leaders.

Ângelo Rafael, a university professor and formerly having done in service training with Aracruz Celulose and Mannesman –another plantation company- and who has studied in the United States of America, spoke on behalf of the CERFLOR team, explaining that Aracruz Celulose still had the old-fashioned ways of the military dictatorship, when the State held most of the company's shares. However with certification the possible negative impacts caused so far, could be reverted. Aracruz took on the responsibility that possibly it may not be fulfilling its commitments. Additionally, according to the professor, the eucalyptus plantations would be beneficial for the population of Espírito Santo, because they are used in building furniture, making books, copy-books and other products consumed by the local population. Eucalyptus would then be comparable to the manioc, maize and bean plantations...

Questioned on these statements and confronted with data refuting them, Professor Angelo Rafael left the Guarani hut in a hurry to go to his car. The other member of the team, who said she was an anthropologist, stayed on a while longer, attempting to argue in favour of the company."

Paulo, a Tupinikim leader, questioned the specialists asking them "what do you people call forests?" For us, plantations are not forests. Our concept of a forest is different from the concept of the scientists. For us a forest is not planted to be cut down later. The forest is the place where we go to look for material for our crafts, to hunt, to look for fruit and to fish in the rivers. Our condition for the company to receive certification is that as a start it gives back the eleven thousand hectares of our land in its power." And speaking on behalf of the Indians, the oldest chief closed the conversation, stating "You are doing your job, but if you only knew the misfortunes that the company has caused here, you would not do this job, no. I could not do it, what the company did here was a crime. That is what the company is, a delinquent. We tell you that we, the Indians we do not agree that they be given this certification."

In spite of all this, CERFLOR has certified all Aracruz plantations. It is therefore evident that CERFLOR's certification programme does not deserve the slightest credibility.

Article based on: "Carta pública da Rede Alerta contra o Deserto Verde sobre a certificação CERFLOR da Aracruz Celulose no Espírito Santo" and "Aracruz Celulose: CER-FLOR que não se cheira", communiqués by the Alert against the Green Desert Network 2005; "Footprints in the forest. Current practice and future challenges in forest certification", 2004, FERN
http://www.fern.org/media/documents/document_1890_1900.pdf
All Aracruz forests now fully certified by Cerflor
<http://www.aracruz.com.br/web/en/imprensa/noticias/noticias177.htm>
Aracruz requests voluntary temporary withdrawal of FSC certification of its Guaíba Unit
<http://www.aracruz.com.br/web/en/imprensa/noticias/noticias178.htm>