
Colombia: The incredible and sad certification of Smurfit plantations

In 2003, WRM paid a field visit to Colombia to acquaint itself with the communities affected by Smurfit plantations and to gather evidence. At that time, we published the following in an article:

“...The local people told us that ‘the plantations have finished off the water,’ that “spraying has finished with everything there was in the soil,’ that ‘there is hardly any fauna left,’ that there used to be ‘clouds of birds’ and that now ‘only in the summer does some bird appear, but not in winter time,’ and that ‘there are no fish left either.’

Regarding employment, we were informed that ‘all the work is seasonal’ (it is outsourced) and that ‘the contract implies working like two and earning like one.’ Only the fittest survive: ‘if [the worker] doesn’t reach production, they remove him, workers can’t be over 40 and all have to be strong to reach that production.’ Regarding worker organization, not only is there no trade union, but ‘he who grumbles is out’ and ‘no comments are allowed here.’”

At that time we thought that with this background, it would be impossible for the company’s plantations ever to obtain certification of a socially and environmentally responsible timber production. However, that same year and in spite of its abominable track record, Smurfit managed to have certified 38,000 hectares of plantations. Concurrently in 2003 we observed with great concern that in spite of its background, Smurfit – through Victor Giraldo – became a member of the Board of Directors of the Forest Stewardship Council, according to information appearing in the FSC Web page.

Recently WRM was again invited to Colombia to visit areas covering vast tracts of plantations belonging to the same company. The situation is just as it was before or even worse as the impacts have become more acute. In the meanwhile Smurfit continues to be a member of the FSC Board of Directors.

For more information on the impacts of Smurfit plantations in Colombia we recommend reading: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/77/Colombia.html>; and “Cómo afecta a las comunidades campesinas y a la biodiversidad. La industria papelera en la zona Andina” (How the pulp industry in the Andean zone affects peasant communities and biodiversity), Guillermo Castaño Arcila, Revista Semillas en la economía campesina, N° 20, December 2005, <http://www.semillas.org.co/articulos.htm?x=24037>