
Nicaragua: The adoption of the "Chilean plantation model"

Nicaragua is still considered the country having the largest forest cover in Central America, and that with the most extensive primary forests. During the decade of 1980 forest destruction was temporarily halted by the war which was taking place up in the mountains, which forced many indigenous and peasant communities to abandon the region.

In 1994 the signature of the First Structural Adjustment Programme meant a boost for the commercial opening of the country. Concessions for the exploitation of natural resources were granted to foreign and national firms. With the excuse of promoting investments and generating jobs forest concessions were granted, and now the government is facing a lawsuit at the Interamerican Court for Human Rights presented by the indigenous communities.

In late 1996 the government submitted a draft forestry bill to the National Assembly, resulting from a consensus reached between several sectors. Nevertheless, there was a lack of will by both government and parliament to pass the Forestry Law. Instead a Forestry Statute was approved, but lacking a general legal and conceptual framework.

During the last years, Nicaraguan forests have been at the mercy of the voracity of the domestic and foreign markets. Responding to pressures at the national and international levels, in 1998 the country's President issued a decree establishing a 5-year moratorium for the extraction and export of fine woods.

The described situation showed the absence of a legal framework and a policy regarding forests and the forestry sector. Nevertheless in 2000, under the pressure of international financial institutions, the Agriculture and Forestry Ministry, together with the Commission for the Environment of the National Assembly, hired consultants to elaborate a new Draft Bill for Forestry Development and Promotion.

The resulting draft bill confirms the statements previously made by the ministers and the president of the Commission for the Environment, who had expressed that the law would follow the Chilean model, since according to them this country has had the best experience in this regard. Last July the proposal was submitted to different sectors in a "consultation" process, who have been working on it since.

Nonetheless, almost no-one appears to be concerned about the fact that the law will include plantations as forests, nor about the incentives aimed exclusively at the forestry industry, nor about the fiddling presented by the clean development mechanism. There was only one consultation with indigenous communities, whose viewpoint was that "this law is useless; we need another one that protects the forest and that does not sell everything."

Nicaragua still has no experience on tree plantations, except that of trials and wind-breaks. Eucalyptus is rejected by peasants, who say that it depletes water resources and are demanding the use of native species in reforestation projects.

Even though for unknown reasons the government and the Assembly are urged to pass the law during this year, this will not happen until March 2001. The reason for this is probably that the authorities and members of parliament are trying to convince themselves about the advantages of the Chilean model.

Article sent by: Centro Alexander von Humboldt, 22/10/2000,