Brazil: response to article published in 'Aracruz News'

By means of this letter, we would like to comment the article of Mr. Julio Cesar Centeno, published in the October edition of 'Aracruz News', bulletin of the pulp and eucalyptus plantation company Aracruz Celulose. In his article, Mr Centeno praises the eucalyptus plantations at Aracruz Celulose because of their "capacity to have a significant impact on local and national economies". Although the author admits that plantations have both positive and negative implications, he merely considers the positive implications, clearly supporting the interests of Aracruz Celulose in promoting its tarnished image. Unfortunately, in spite of the 'objective' tone of his article, Mr. Centeno is one more of the group of so-called 'specialists', that plantation companies need to justify their activities and to cover the well-known negative impacts that their plantations have on local people and environment.

We would like to make some remarks:

- It should really be a principle, as Mr. Centeno suggests, that “plantations should not involve the replacement of the natural tree cover on a particular site”. However, Aracruz Celulose cleared extensive areas of native forests to implement its eucalyptus plantations, as has been proven by aerial photographs and local testimonies, and causing a disaster for local biodiversity.
- The author states that 'plantations can significantly improve the livelihoods of surrounding populations'. However, the more Aracruz company occupied intensively the geographical space, the more it contributed to the loss of structure in the socially, culturally and economically valid forms of production, organisation and land use, especially of the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous communities.
- For sure 'plantations of eucalyptus must carefully match water demand to availability', because in the Aracruz case the water levels of the streams and brooks in the few native forest which was left, have dropped, often resulting in the complete disappearance of these streams, which anyone can check in the region, just asking elder Tupinikim and Guarani Indians to show these places.
- Finally, if what Mr Centeno means by 'significant impact' of Aracruz on the local and national economy is that it had had a significant negative impact, then such assertion is especially true, for instance in the number of people employed by the company, which dropped from 7.400 in 1990 to around 2.000 at present (in spite of the continuous growth of the company), having severe consequences for the local economy. Inversely, it must be stressed that the national economy has had a strong positive impact on Aracruz, which has received all sorts of economic support from the Brazilian state since it began its operations and is even exempted from most taxes because its production is export-oriented.

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