

International Day Against Monoculture Plantations

by Carbon Trade Watch and FASE-ES
Sunday, 22 September 2013

Carbon Trade Watch and FASE-ES are finalizing the photo essay "Like Oil and Water: Struggles Against the Brazilian Green Economy" based on a collaborative fieldwork carried out in the Espirito Santo and Bahia regions in Brazil last year. The photo essay will highlight the links between oil and monoculture industries through the stories of people directly impacted. This work aims to highlight the economic and political connections between these capital intensive industries under apparently "green" discourses through experiences of struggle.

On the International Day Against Monoculture Plantations, CTW and FASE-ES stand in solidarity with those resisting monocultures around the world. Today, we share one of the stories of resistance against the destructive green deserts in Brazil. La Lucha Sigue!

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GREEN DESERTS

Eucalyptus monoculture dominates the landscape in Espirito Santo. This is not an innocent tree planting project; in fact, some regional estimations report up to 80% of the lands are enclosed by eucalyptus and sugar cane monocultures. This is the case in the municipalities of Conceição da Barra and São Mateus located in the far northeast of the state. Eucalyptus plantations were installed during the military dictatorship and began operating in territories including traditional lands of the Tupinikim and Guarani Indigenous Peoples as well as in Quilombola regions. Communities have struggled for decades to survive the continued land evictions, waterway contamination, pesticide* poisonings, depletion of their livelihoods and biodiversity, destruction of the Atlantic Forest, exploited labor under appalling conditions, and continued threats from the eucalyptus industry.

Eucalyptus is a fast growing tree that has a six year rotation cycle in tropical climates at low altitude. Brazil is the first country to allow research on genetically modified eucalyptus trees that would produce more pulp, grow faster, and at higher altitudes.

In 2008, Plantar SA** began a women's worker program to supposedly "empower women" from Quilombola communities by employing them as "guardians" of the plantations. The work came with long hours, direct contact with dangerous pesticides and little to no support from the company. Exploitative work programs such as these often serve to create internal conflicts between and within communities and damage local organizing efforts.

Quilombola communities are a recognized cultural group of former slave descendents that revolted against the Portuguese colonizers and set up their own communities. Quilombola people have legal rights to their lands in Brazil but are severely discriminated against. The exploiting companies in the region take advantage of these inequalities.

Plantar SA not only has profited by destroying livelihoods, it has destroyed the social and local environment. Some areas of the plantations are considered "carbon offsetting" projects under the slogan of "reducing greenhouse gases". The company to generate carbon credits and sell them onto polluters in carbon markets. By sustaining an environmentally destructive model of monocultures and steel production, offset projects do nothing to improve the climate.

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Sineide dos Santos Correia

Sineide worked for Plantar SA spraying pesticides for more than two and a half years until her health was destroyed and she was forced by the company to leave without compensation. She was in regular contact with a toxic insecticide called Mirex-S, which has been shown to produce cancer, harmful effects on stomach and intestinal linings, damage to the nervous system and the reproductive system, among others. On several occasions Sineide passed out while working in the fields and would receive only a few minutes rest before being forced to return to work. She now suffers from reoccurring health problems. Sineide is nevertheless an industrious woman who raises several species of fowl, pigs, and vegetables. She is generous of heart, completely direct in her way of speaking and a great cook!

â€œI worked for two years and eight months for Plantar. When they hired us they told us we would work in the nursery, but after the training they told me the job was to spray Mirex on the ants in the fields. Except for when it rained, then we weeded and marked the plants.

They gave us little food and it was bad. The water was muddy, hot and tasted like chlorine. One day I complained of lack of water and the manager told me: â€œI do not care if youâ€™re thirsty, you have to finish the entire field before we leave at 6pm. Because I complained, he took away hours on my timecard. If you miss one day, they dock you for two. We caught the bus at 4:30 am but there was never a fixed hour that we would return. In general we returned around 6pm.

They only gave us two changes of clothes so I had to wear the same clothes contaminated one day after the other. I would come home in the same clothes and wash them at the weekend. I had to carry heavy boxes on my head that started to give me back pain. One woman fell into a hole with the pesticide pump on her back and they said it was her lack of attention. But the whole ground is lined with eucalyptus leaves and twigs. Today her leg is worse. She and was waiting for the INSS [InscriÃ§Ã£o no Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social; Social Security Administration] at home without pay for two or three months. She was not just sent away because it was an accident at work.

The people who did the training with us warned that the products would harm our breathing, blood, bowels, and give us headaches and vomiting. Why do women still work for this company? To be able to support their children because many are single mothers.â€•

â€œAfter a year working for Plantar I started to feel pain daily and I wore a mask.

When I went to bed at night my heart pounded and I have never had heart trouble. I also had dryness in the throat and difficulty breathing. I felt colicky with abdominal pain and I would pass three or four days without defecating and when I did it looked like a glue. My menstrual flow increased so much that I had to wear disposable menstrual pads and change them every hour, and it wouldnâ€™t hold the flow, it was like a river.

Later I started having a crisis with strong convulsions where I would fall onto the ground and talk all balled up about two times per month. They took me to the doctor and he said it was just nerves. He gave me medicine, I fell asleep and then he sent me home. He just gave me a painkiller.

I had to buy so many medicines with my own money for weakness in the bones, spine and blood. The medication made me vomit. To this day I have no more appetite, it seems that my stomach is closed, is smaller, and I feel a pain in my abdomen all the time. I feel drowsiness, despondency and depression.

I thought for a long time that it was not all because of the product [Mirex] but when I realized it was, I left the job. If I would have continued on, I would not be alive anymore. Every day I was weaker. I left this job. I lost my health at this job. This work at Plantar is captivity. People have already suffered too much working for them."

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