

BRAZIL

Sugar production in Brazil

Sugar production doubled in Brazil between 2000 and 2010 driven by rising international sugar prices and domestic demand for ethanol, which is widely used in motor vehicles.

In order to deliver these huge leaps in production the area of land planted with sugar cane has expanded rapidly – mainly because of the occupation of new areas in the south, south east and mid-west of the country. Between 2000 and 2010, sugarcane land occupation in the 6 main states - Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás, Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Paraná and Mato Grosso - expanded by million hectares to around 7.5 million hectares.

Past and present Brazilian governments have actively supported the growth of the sugar industry – investing billions of dollars of public money in the sector, setting advantageous interest rates for lending to the industry, and providing tax relief and a guaranteed market (fuel must contain at least 25 per cent ethanol).

Land conflicts in Brazil

Land conflicts have long been a problem in Brazil because of the lack of state presence in many areas of this vast country, uncertainty over land ownership, the power of agribusinesses and poor management of clashes between indigenous communities and farmers.

The number of land conflicts has risen in recent years. In 2012, 36 people were killed as a result of land conflicts - a 24 per cent increase over the previous year. In 2012, 37 per cent of recorded conflicts (396 out of 1067) were in sugar cane regions.

Landless people and small holders with no documented proof that they own their land are the main victims. Indigenous people and “Quilombolas” (descendants of slaves that escaped and established communities in the countryside centuries ago) represent more than a quarter of all people affected by land conflicts.

USINA TRAPICHE SUGAR MILL IN PERNAMBUCO STATE

Pernambuco State has one of the highest levels of land conflicts in Brazil. In 2012 there were 105 land conflicts – 42 directly related to the production of sugar cane.

In the municipality of Sirinhaém in the southern coastal region of Pernambuco State a sugar company, Usina Trapiche, has been in conflict with a local fishing community over use of islands in the estuary for decades. Usina Trapiche was first established in 1887 and became part of the Serra Grande group in 1997. It operates on 28,500 hectares of land, most of which is used for sugar cane production. Usina Trapiche provides sugar to Coca-Cola and PepsiCo amongst other food and drink companies.

A fishing community had been living on 17 islands in the estuary since 1914 – collecting shellfish and fishing to eat and sell and growing subsistence crops. The estuary and the islands are State owned however, according to the Pastoral Land Commission, the State recognised the right of the islanders to live in the estuary because their subsistence lifestyle did little harm to the ecosystem and provided sustenance for many people.

Trapiche first attempted to expel the community in the early 1980's at a time when the sugar industry was booming. By the mid 1980's, with the sugar industry in decline, Trapiche lost interest in the land and the community were given the right to remain on the islands.

In 1998, with the sugar-ethanol industry expanding again, Trapiche renewed its interest in the land. According to the islanders the companies' private militia burned down their houses and destroyed their land then, after they had rebuilt their homes, the militia returned and burned them down again. The community received threats of further violence and destruction if they did not leave the area.

The 53 families, which make up the island community, continued to fight for their rights to live on the land but in 2002 Trapiche was successful, through court proceedings, in pushing the community off their land. Federal officials have tried, unsuccessfully, to restore the community's rights to the land but Trapiche has successfully leveraged their political influence to retain control.

Some of the families were given small basic brick houses with electricity and running water but some received no compensation and are reportedly homeless. The families have no land on which to plant fruit trees, cassava or other crops and they have to travel great distances from the slums to the estuary to fish and collect shellfish. Whereas once they were able to subsist and make a small living beyond their own needs now they must spend most of what they earn to buy food.

A small number of fishermen and women return to the land to live for short periods while they fish but they say they have been threatened with violence and their huts are routinely burned down by Trapiche employees and the Military Police.

As well as being expelled from their land the community also complains that Trapiche's mill has polluted the water – making fishing impossible for at least half of the year. The company has been repeatedly fined by government bodies for polluting the water and causing the death of hundreds of thousands of fish. An investigation into the environmental damage caused by the company is on-going.

The community continues to fight for its land. With help from local NGOs the community is campaigning for the land to be designated a Federal Extractive Reserve - this would overrule the previous court ruling made at the State level in favour of the company and allow the community to return to their land. The application was approved by The Chico Mendes Institute for Conservation of Biodiversity in 2009, but no action has been taken by the State, which also has to approve it. This has been in large part due to political influence by the sugar mill.

BUNGE MILL IN MATO GROSSO DO SUL

In the State of Mato Grosso do Sul 51 indigenous territories are going through the formal recognition and demarcation process (required to give the indigenous communities legal rights over their land). Many other communities are waiting to have their territories recognized. These processes are being impeded as a result of political pressure from agribusinesses.

The state has seen a huge expansion in sugar farming in recent years - the area of land planted with sugar cane tripled in just seven years from 160 thousand hectares in 2007 to 570 thousand hectares between in 2012. The state has the highest rate of violence against indigenous peoples - 37 of the 60 indigenous people murdered in Brazil in 2012 were killed in the State and 567 of the 1276 cases of violence against indigenous people happened there. There are clear links between agribusiness expansion and the extraordinary level of violence against indigenous people.

This case relates to 8800 ha of indigenous land, called Jatayvary, which is located in the municipality of Ponta Porã, on the border of Brazil and Paraguay. The Guarani-kaiowá people have lived on the land for centuries and have been fighting the often-violent occupation of their land for agricultural expansion for decades. The community has suffered repeated evictions but has always returned.

In 2004, after more than 30 years of struggle, the Brazilian National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), part of the Ministry of Justice, formally recognized the Guarani-kaiowá's rights to their land. In 2011, the Minister of Justice published the declaration of Jatayvary, setting the boundaries to the land. The land still needs to be officially demarcated (physical identification of the boundaries) and officially designated as indigenous land (a bureaucratic process) before it is legally theirs. This process will take some years to complete and local plantation owners are fighting it at every step. For example, intimidation and threats from agricultural interests prevented FUNAI and the Federal Police from demarcating the communities land.

Large sugarcane farms – up to 500 hectares in size - now cover most of the communities land. The community used to be self-sufficient in food, but the loss of their land, hunting and fishing grounds to

sugarcane means they now struggle to get by. The community is also affected by the pesticides sprayed on the sugar plantations from the air which causes diarrhea and vomiting (particularly amongst children) and the heavy traffic going to and from the plantations which brings noise, dust and has led to a number of accidents.

The US food giant Bunge purchased a mill called *Monteverde* in Ponta Porã in 2008 which produces ethanol and sugar. Unlike many other sugar mills that operate in the region, Bunge has declared they intend to continue to buy sugarcane from five farms located inside the indigenous communities land until their contracts end, in 2014.

Coca-Cola purchases sugar from Bunge in Brazil. Coca-Cola says the sugar does not come from the Monteverde mill. However, this case highlights that the company has no policies in place to ensure their suppliers' operations respect national laws and do not lead to land conflicts or land grabs.

A more detailed outline of each case is available – please contact anna.ratcliff@oxfaminternational.org for a copy