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Finnish state logs in Saami reindeer areas but who will buy the wood?

Conflicts over logging on Saami reindeer herding territory in Finnish Lapland began again last week but this time paper giant Stora Enso refuses to purchase the wood. Rebecca Lawrence, researcher at the Department of Sociology, Stockholm University, shows in her latest publication that campaigns by Indigenous and Environmental NGOs have been successful in using the market of ethical investment to encourage Stora Enso to pay more attention to Indigenous and environmental concerns.

Rebecca Lawrence's research has looked at how Saami Council, an Indigenous NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation), and Greenpeace, have campaigned against logging on fragile Saami reindeer herding territory in Finnish Lapland. Stora Enso has historically been the largest purchaser of wood from the disputed areas in Finnish Lapland. Up until November 2005 Stora Enso was buying wood from Metsähallitus, the Finnish state logging enterprise, against the wishes of local Saami reindeer herders. At the same time, Stora Enso was committed to respecting the rights of Indigenous people according to the company's own sustainability policies and listing on various sustainability and ethical indices. Two years ago, Saami Council approached the largest sustainability and ethical indices in the UK and Europe, Dow Jones Sustainability Index and FTSE4Good, and highlighted the contradiction in Stora Enso's wood procurement practices.

Rebecca Lawrence has studied how ethical analysts at the ethical indices, and Socially Responsible Investors in Sweden, have encouraged dialogues between Stora Enso and Saami Council. These dialogues, combined with public campaigns by Saami Council and Greenpeace, have placed pressure on Stora Enso to ensure that it no longer purchases conflict wood from Metsähallitus.

- When I began researching this Stora Enso did not have a detailed written policy on its procurement of wood from disputed areas in Finnish Lapland. Stora Enso was giving mixed messages about its procurement policy to ethical investors, to ethical analysts, to customers, to stakeholders and to its own supplier. At the height of the conflicts Stora Enso was communicating several different versions of their definition of 'disputed areas'. Over the last two years, however, Stora Enso has developed a more rigorous policy that requires the consent of Saami reindeer herders prior to logging activities. Challenges remain, however, in ensuring that this policy is based on the principle of *free, prior and informed* consent of Saami reindeer herders, says Rebecca Lawrence.

The research has also shown that Saami protests highlight a paradox in Scandinavia: while Nordic states and corporations claim to uphold a social justice model within the international arena, they have traditionally remained reluctant to recognise Indigenous claims on their own home fronts.

- The last two years I have seen a positive development in Stora Enso's engagement with questions of Indigenous rights in Finland. Stora Enso has traditionally placed emphasis on the rights of Indigenous peoples in countries outside of Europe, for example in Brazil and Uruguay. Since the campaigns by Saami Council, however, it has become clear that the conflicts over logging on Saami reindeer herding territory require a deeper corporate engagement with

questions of Saami rights as *Indigenous* rights. Stora Enso has been active in initiating round-table dialogues, but some challenges remain for the company in recognising the *unique* rights of Saami reindeer herders, says Rebecca Lawrence.

The 92 000 hectares of disputed areas in Finnish Lapland had not been logged by Metsähallitus since November 2005. Last week, however, Metsähallitus began logging again within the disputed areas.

- It remains to be seen which company will be the purchaser of this conflict wood now that Stora Enso refuses to purchase from the disputed areas. It also remains to be seen how the recently elected Finnish government will manage the Upper Lapland issue. As my research has shown, the issue of Saami rights is a challenge both for private industry and for the Finnish government. And any solution will require the commitment of both the Finnish forestry industry *and* the Finnish state, says Rebecca Lawrence.

The research has been published by Blackwell in a special edition on Indigenous Rights in the international journal.

Further information

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