

Environmental

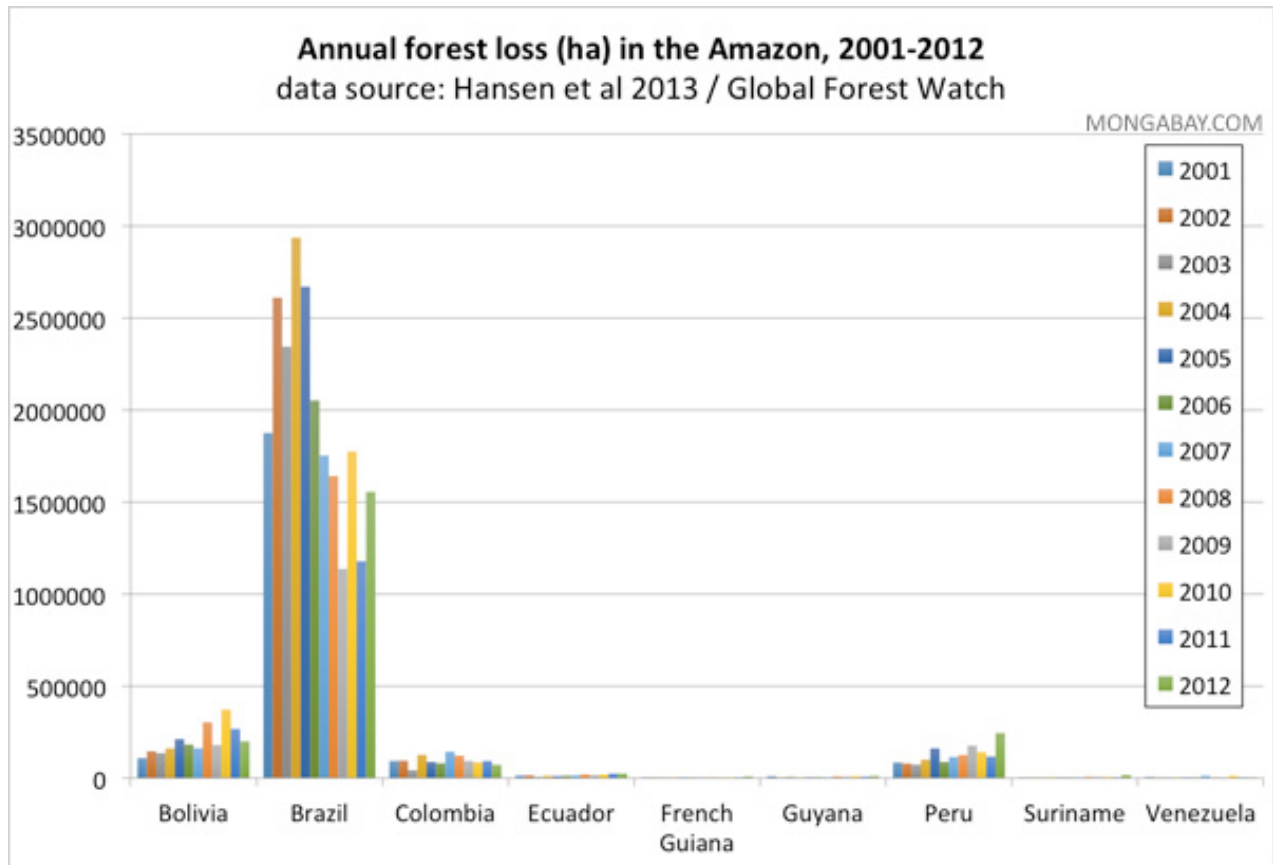
“Measures to halt deforestation and desertification in the Amazon”

Forum: Environmental
Issue: Measures to halt deforestation and desertification in the Amazon
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Context & Historical Background



The Amazon rainforest is located in the Amazon region in South America. (View map below) The rainforest covers an area of 5,500,000 square kilometres. Of the area covered by the rainforest, 60% belongs to Brazil, 13% to Peru, 10% to Columbia, and the remaining area is divided among Bolivia, Guyana, Venezuela, Ecuador, Suriname and French Guiana. Hosting over 16,000 species and 390 billion trees, it is the largest rainforest in the world. Starting around 1978, the process of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest has increased significantly. The motives behind the destruction of the rainforest have changed through time. Before 1978, most of the destruction was caused by farmers who chopped trees down to sustain an acceptable amount of crops produced. In the second half of the twentieth century with a reference date that revolves around 1978, industrial and agricultural motives accelerated the process of deforestation. The industrial need for resources found in trees and land for agriculture accelerated the process of deforestation. At the start of the 21st century, about 75% of the deforestation happening in the Amazon was a result of cattle-ranching. As a result of the deforestation that had accelerated at the end of the 20th century, the roads in the rainforest multiplied leading to poor settlers and illegal loggers. Most of the countries considered “Amazonian” have seen the rate of deforestation increase since the start of the 21st century. The exception is Brazil, who have surprisingly seen the rate decrease. “The drop has been

fueled by a number of factors, including increased law enforcement, satellite monitoring, pressure from environmentalists, private and public sector initiatives, new protected areas, and macroeconomic trends.” (Mongabay)

Considering the clear improvement that has been shown in Brazil’s rates of deforestation, countries present in the Amazon rainforest should act accordingly. The reason why deforestation is fought amongst the international community is that it has lasting destructive effects on numerous aspects of the environment. Deforestation increases greenhouse gases because as trees are chopped down, the gases escape the surface and reach Earth’s atmosphere. Seeing as the Amazon is responsible for about 20% of Earth’s oxygen, the process of deforestation is calamitous for both the environment and people on Earth. Another destructive result of deforestation is the amount of water levels. The metaphoric shield created by the trees allows the water cycle to be somewhat stable. The trees form a barrier that stops all the rain from reaching the ground. With trees disappearing at an increasing rate, the water cycle is losing its stability as water hits the soil directly. This causes a shortage in water storage which eventually leads to dry soil. As a result, dry soil results in hardships in regards to crop growth hence affecting the agricultural sector of the economy. The problem with logging is that it is a vicious cycle. As farmers move through the Amazon rainforest to log, the treeless area are directly affected by the changed water cycle. In addition to the inability to grow crops, soil erosion and flooding occurs. In order for the farmers concerned to sustain at an acceptable level of production, they are forced to move to a different area where the process is repeated.



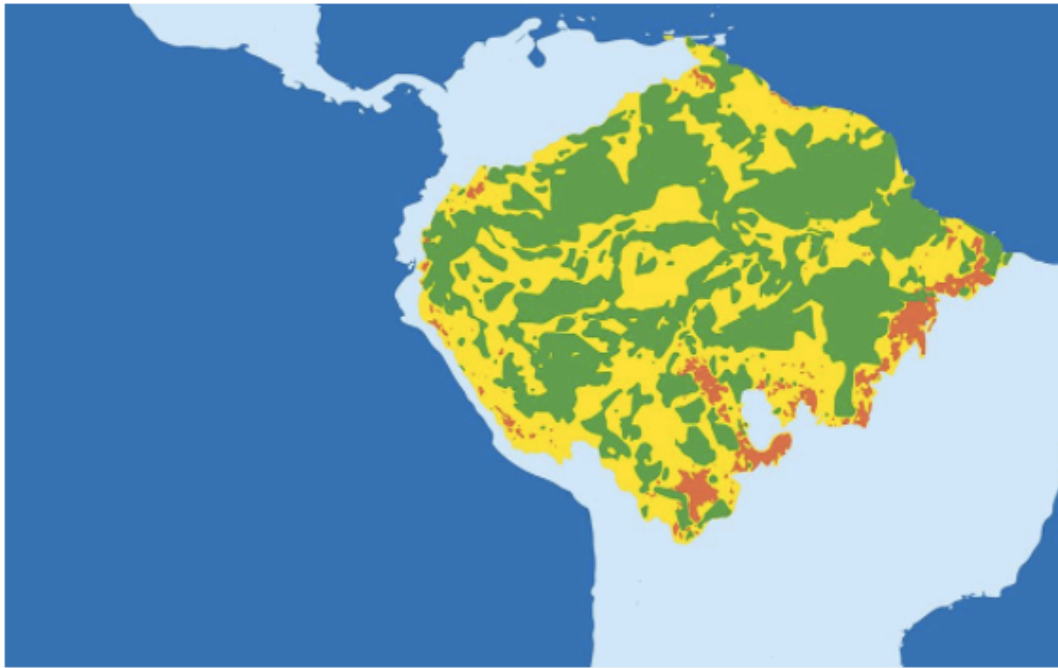
United Nations Involvement

Considering both the effects of deforestation as well as the presence of mining and urbanisation, the United Nations has decided to intervene. The goal as stated by the UN Environment Program (UNEP) was to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. “This new project, funded by the Global Environment Facility, fundamentally acknowledges the crucial economic value of nature and the goods and services provided by river systems, forests and other ecosystems,” Mr. Toepfer said.”(United Nations, Toepfer). The United Nations’ goal to meet the Millennium Development Goals in the Amazon region is in the environment’s best interest but it must not be forgotten that the land belongs to countries in the Amazonian region. Considering the UN Charter’s points about sovereignty, resolutions must take under consideration the fact that the land is not international land.

The Food and Agriculture Organization linked to the United Nations has conducted several operations where they have come up with results regarding deforestation in the region. According to their reports, deforestation has slowed down by about 50% since the start of the 21st Century. This, however, is not enough, considering “129 million hectares of forest -- an area almost equivalent in size to South Africa -- have been lost since 1990.” (FAO) The most recent global meeting, the World Forestry Congress, was held in 2015. The matter was discussed amongst the international countries but radical measures are yet to be taken considering the division of the region.

The solutions to end deforestation have been discussed among individual governments and independent corporations but are yet to be determined as rules as a part of the United Nations. In order for these goals to reach the status of rules, the United Nations must discuss the matter with the presence of the countries involved to avoid any infringement in terms of countries' sovereignty. The popular solutions discussed among countries individually include expanding the green zone of the region and optimizing the production in the red zone. This can be done in the red zone if the different uses for resources in the region are regulated more strictly. However, such solutions can only be made official if the countries in the Amazonian region accept the terms proposed.

1. **Green Zone** (45 percent of Amazonia): Forest officially designated as protected areas or indigenous lands and territories.
2. **Yellow Zone** (46 percent): Mostly forested land that has not yet been formally protected or developed.
3. **Red Zone** (9 percent): Land that has already been converted to agriculture, developed into cities or otherwise degraded by human activities.



Map (simplified for communication purposes) of Amazonia's Green, Yellow and Red zones. [Click to enlarge.](#) (© Conservation International)

Different Perspectives

NGO's: "Greenpeace Netherlands and the Coordinator of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA) have launched a new campaign called "All Eyes on the Amazon" against deforestation in the Amazon rainforest." (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation) Rather than taking hands -on initiative as proposed by the United Nations, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation has planned a different project where satellites

will be placed to monitor the actions in the Amazon rainforest. These images would be shown to indigenous people in the Amazon rainforest to show the dangers of deforestation. International organisations such as the UN and the UNPO who consider the problem of deforestation to be a critical one in terms of environmental problems. Hence, such organisations wish to take action against the Amazonian countries' passive stance. They wish to do so both for the environment and the indigenous people living in the region who are directly affected by deforestation but vulnerable to it.

Brazil: Considering the passive stance the Brazilian government as had in the matter, exposing such images to indigenous people would be motivating enough for them to take action. “To halt deforestation in the Amazon, an exceptional coalition has been created between environmental and human rights organisations and the prominent Coordinator of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA).” (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation) “Brazil won't endorse a United Nations global anti-deforestation initiative, saying it was left out of the consultation process.” (NBC News) According to Brazilian government officials, Brazil's inaction in the matter does not allow the United Nations to impose anything upon it.

United States: The United States sees the importance of protecting the Amazon region. In 2010, “The United States and Brazil have signed an agreement converting \$21 million of Brazilian debt into a fund to protect tropical ecosystems.” (BBC News) This sacrifice made by the United States shows their interest in protecting the Amazon region from deforestation.

Questions to Consider

- How can actions be taken in the Amazon region without impeding on the sovereignty of the countries there?
- Should the international community implicate itself directly in the region? Should they only recommend actions for the countries geographically involved?

- Who should be responsible for funding recovery projects in the area?
- Should countries and organizations who fund projects in the region benefit in return?

Key Terms & Phrases

- **Deforestation** - Deforestation is the process by which large areas of forests are being destroyed. There are several factors that contribute to deforestation. Two of the most prominent factors are trees and land. Trees are excessively chopped down for their different uses in industry. The land is also used for agricultural purposes hence encouraging the process of deforestation.
- **Cattle-ranching** - Cattle ranching is a method of raising livestock. Ranches are areas of land where animals are raised before they are sold. This practice has increased in popularity. It is dangerous for rainforests because areas in rainforests are convenient for this practice hence increasing deforestation.
- **Greenhouse Gases** - These are gases that absorb infrared radiation. As a result, it affects the greenhouse effect. Carbon dioxide is an example of a greenhouse gas.
- **Logging** - The practice of chopping trees down for industrial purposes. The several uses of the components of trees have an accelerating effect on the process of deforestation.
- **Level of production** - The expected outcome of production in an economy. Higher levels of production require a more efficient use of resources to optimize the outcome of production.

- **Green Zone** - Area that constitutes 45% of the region which is protected territory or indigenous territory.

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