

Strengthening Voices for Better Choices in Brazil

Helping to free Acre of illegal logging

Forest governance in Brazil

Brazil, the world's fifth-largest country, has the greatest extent of forest in the tropics. This includes nearly a third of the world's remaining tropical rainforests, found mainly in the Amazon Basin. Partly because of its size, Brazil is the world's leading mega-biodiversity country, with more than 56,000 recorded vascular plant species, 1,600 bird species and 77 primates.

Deforestation rates in Brazil vary among the major forest biomes. The loss of the Atlantic rainforest, for example, has largely been halted and in places is being reversed. The dry forests of the central *cerrado* savannas, however, are shrinking at a faster rate than the more famous Amazon rainforests. Deforestation in the Amazon has declined in recent years, owing to greater government action and falling prices for beef and soybeans. As prices have rebounded, however, so the pace of clearing for ranches and cropland has re-accelerated.

Though important, high commodity prices are only part of the story behind deforestation. Large-scale infrastructure projects, weak and permissive land policies, corruption, collusion and other factors all contribute to forest loss and degradation. Illegal logging is a particular concern – recent official estimates put the share of illegally harvested wood in Brazil at between 64% and 93%.

Brazil has been taking a range of measures to tackle deforestation and improve governance in the Amazon, including legal reform, anti-corruption campaigns, improved remote sensing technologies and expansion of protected areas. The federal government has also recently imposed stricter rules on



The Rio Negro, Brazil. IUCN Photo Library © Jim Thorsell

granting subsidised credit to ranchers and other farmers. These actions are all coordinated under the National Plan to Prevent and Control Deforestation in the Amazon, run jointly by 13 ministries under the supervision of the office of the presidential Chief of Staff.

A new Public Forest Management Law, approved in March 2006, introduced several mechanisms for regulating public forest use, created the Brazilian Forest Service (BFS) and established a national forest development fund. Under the law, the BFS has registered almost 200 million hectares of public forest, of which 123 million hectares are destined for community use.

The Public Forest Management Law also allowed government bodies to manage national, state and municipal forests directly, and for the first time gave state agencies a

role in monitoring compliance with regulations. Together with Brazil's progressive decentralisation of forest responsibilities over the past decade, the control and enforcement of forest law is now almost entirely in state hands.

Civil society participation is guaranteed by Brazil's 1988 Constitution, and enabled by mechanisms at several levels. Nationally they include the National Commission on Forests (CONAFLO) and the National Commission on Public Forests (CGFLOP).

The scale and nature of Brazil's forest problems, and hence the impact and effectiveness of these measures, vary from state to state. In general, the fight against illegal logging continues to be hindered by a lack of human and financial resources, the size of the forest resource, the absence of the

state in large, isolated regions, and perverse economic incentives. Strong civil society participation, however, has been moving the forest policy agenda forward, balancing law enforcement with strategic actions aimed at better forest governance.

Strengthening voices for better choices

In response to these challenges, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) launched “Strengthening Voices for Better Choices” (SVBC). Financed mainly by the European Union, this global project aims to test and promote improved governance arrangements that will engender sustainable and equitable forest conservation and management.

In Brazil, one of six project countries globally, SVBC is pursuing this goal in Acre, Brazil’s westernmost state (see map). Acre is of minor territorial or economic importance, but it has been leading the search for environmental and social policy alternatives.

Illegality plagued Acre’s forest sector for many years up to 1999, when a conservation-minded governor took office and launched a drive towards “forest government”. Inspired by Chico Mendes, the activist and union leader who led a civic movement against deforestation in the 1980s, the state has been strengthening its extractive industries (such as rubber and Brazil nuts), setting aside protected areas and creating incentives for improving forest management.

Roughly half of Acre’s territory is now in protected areas, and it has kept its average deforestation rate to about 0.3% a year. Nevertheless, Acre has not succeeded in lowering either total deforestation (541 km² in 2005 compared with 441 km² in 1999), or its share of overall forest loss in the Brazilian Amazon (2.9% in 2005 and 2.6% in 1999).

SVBC’s strategy in Acre is based on the belief that illegal logging is essentially a problem of governance, not law enforcement. Furthermore, conserving forests and promoting sustainable activities must go beyond illegality *per se*, as some technically illegal activities may be sustainable and some legal activities unsustainable.

These considerations have led SVBC, together with its main partner, WWF Brazil, to develop a three-pronged strategy under the banner “Free Acre of Illegal Logging”. This focuses on promoting better practices, improving governance and creating responsible markets. The overall objective is to remove the incentives for unsustainable and illegal activities, driving up their opportunity costs and increasing the attractiveness of sustainable alternatives.



LEGEND

International boundary	Closed evergreen tropical forest	Intensive agriculture
State boundary	Bamboo-dominated forest	Mosaic of agriculture and degraded forest
River	Semi-deciduous transition forest	Shrub savannah
State/Provincial capital	Freshwater flooded forest	
City/Town		

Land cover map of Acre, Brazil. Land cover is based on the Vegetation Map of South America, prepared under the Global Land Cover 2000 Project (<http://www-gem.jrc.it/glc2000/>).

SVBC is partnering with a wide range of local, national and international organisations to realise its goals. Besides WWF Brazil, it is working with the Federation of Industries of Acre and the state government to develop a stepwise approach to legality verification and certification for forest companies. It has also established a partnership with the state government and several NGOs, including Greenpeace Brazil, to jointly implement actions under the “Free Acre of Illegal Logging” banner. Locally and nationally, IUCN has been playing a role in policy making through

its participation in Acre’s State Forest Council and CONAFLOOR.

SVBC’s achievements

Promoting better practices Together with WWF Brazil and members of WWF’s Global Forest & Trade Network (GFTN), IUCN has helped to establish the SIM programme in Acre. SIM, or Modular Implementation System, is a stepwise system aimed at enabling forest companies to attain certification. Participants commit to improving their management practices and obtaining FSC certifica-

tion within four years. The programme also supports improved forest governance, generation of knowledge and capacity building.

As part of the SIM programme, SVBC has concentrated on promoting business and community participation, encouraging government buy-in and support, providing training in certification, reduced-impact logging and administration of cooperatives, and supporting audits of the action plans prepared by SIM participants. The project has also contributed to formulating a Modular Certification Standard for Community Forest Management to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to participate.

To date, six logging companies, four of which are in Acre, have joined the programme. A number of community enterprises are also preparing to join.

In 2008 the SIM programme was adopted as a reference programme for Acre's Forestry and Forest Products Processing Quality Programme. This is being developed under a partnership agreement between IUCN, WWF Brazil, the Federation of Industries of Acre and the state government to promote good social and environmental practices, and to enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of the state's forest sector.

Improving governance SVBC's work aims to create a culture of informed debate within and between different forest stakeholder groups. The purpose of such debate is to help different groups assess their governance needs and priorities, find common ground for dialogue and action, and so influence policy and decision making.

This approach has been divided into three phases. In the first, strategic studies were conducted to provide stakeholders with high-quality information and analysis. SVBC supported five such studies – a na-

tional assessment of Brazil's forest laws and policies, and four thematic studies on the needs of local institutions (related to governance, forest policies, indigenous peoples policies and economic instruments).

In the second phase, specific meetings were held to discuss the issues raised by the studies and identify points for action.

A seminar was organised in April 2008 to present the main findings from the national and thematic studies, and to define the main elements of a civil society agenda. SVBC also played an active part in organising the first International Congress on Community Forest Management, held in Acre in 2008, and the state's first seminar on environmental licensing in 2007.

These meetings have helped stakeholders to develop their thinking and positions on governance reform, to better understand the concerns of other groups and, ultimately, to contribute to a new state regulation on licensing forest management.

The project is now in the third and final phase of giving support to implement the plans developed by stakeholders. This has included support to Acre's state government to restructure the State Forest Council to improve civil society participation (a move prompted largely by the findings of SVBC's thematic study on governance). The project has also helped the Council to identify key topics for debate and deliberation.

Creating responsible markets The third arm of SVBC's strategy in Acre is to reduce unfair price competition from illegal timber and improve market access for legal products. The project is pursuing two different approaches to this end.

In the first, SVBC has been promoting responsible public purchasing in partnership with Greenpeace Brazil (through the pro-

My wish as director of Acre's Wood Companies Union is to sensitize the whole sector to the importance of participating in the SIM programme, and to transform the sector's social and environmental profile.

—Jandir Santini
President, Triunfo Veneers &
Director, Wood Companies Union of Acre

gramme "Cities Friends of the Amazon"). As yet there are no federal or state legal mechanisms requiring Brazilian authorities to procure legal or sustainable timber. SVBC and Greenpeace have been working to establish such a mechanism in Acre by raising awareness and supporting a state working group to identify legal options. The first fruits of this work have been commitments by Acre's state government and the city council of Rio Branco to purchase only legal wood.

In the second approach, SVBC, WWF Brazil and the GFTN have been promoting corporate responsible purchasing policies among participants in the SIM programme. One of the benefits of this programme is that participants have the opportunity to access new domestic and international markets through trade members of the GFTN. This gives them an incentive to expand their sources of certified and trustable timber, and reduce any illegal or suspicious sources.

The methodology used to develop corporate purchasing policies is based on two guides prepared by WWF through the GFTN: *Responsible Purchasing* and *Keep It Legal*. SVBC has contributed to the Portuguese version of *Keep It Legal*, which will be published jointly by IUCN and WWF in February 2009.

Future activities of SVBC

SVBC is due to end in mid 2009. In the time remaining, the project will work with local stakeholders to ensure they can take over and sustain its achievements. This work will cover three main areas:

- ▶ Helping companies and communities assume responsibility for the SIM programme. This process will be helped by the programme's inclusion in the State Forestry Quality Programme, and by developing a group certification scheme for communities with IUCN's Livelihoods and Landscapes (LLS) project in Acre.
- ▶ Continuing to implement the recommendations of SVBC's governance study, with regard to restructuring of state forest institutions, developing a private sector agenda for reform, and promoting dialogue between the private sector and communities. The project will also ensure



SIM programme participants undergoing training in improved management practices. Photo © Marcelo Arguelles

that the lessons of this work are properly documented and communicated.

- Consolidating skills for improving governance and forest management. In the public policy arena, SVBC will focus on ensuring that state forest institutions are able to manage participatory processes, resolve conflicts and support planning. In the timber sector, the focus of support will be on new techniques for sustainable forest management. SVBC will also help to finance and implement the first year of a long-term capacity-building programme for community forestry extension agents.

SVBC contacts in Brazil

Marcelo Arguelles

National Project Coordinator
marcelo.arguelles@sur.iucn.org

Guido Broekhoven

Senior Forest Governance Officer
guido.broekhoven@iucn.org



INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE

FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Rue Mauverney 28
CH-1196 Gland
Switzerland
forests@iucn.org
Tel +41 (22) 999-0261/3
Fax +41 (22) 364-9720
www.iucn.org



Children on Marajó Island at the mouth of the Amazon River, Brazil. IUCN Photo Library © Julie Griffin



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