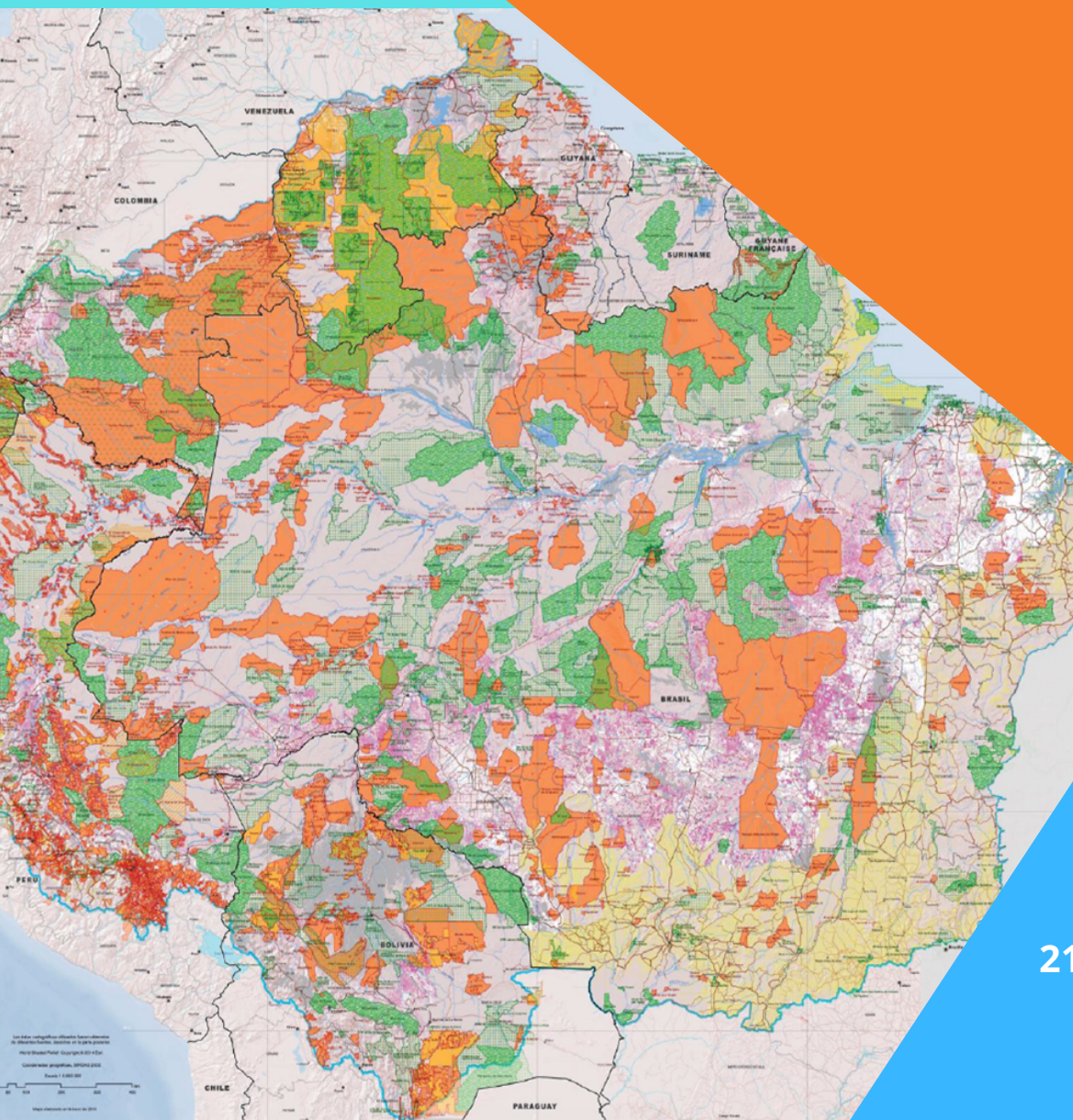


Amazonia Beyond the Crisis

Accountability for Deforestation: Preventing Further Human Rights, Environmental and Economic Disasters

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21 September 2019
New York City



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The following report presents a summary of the meeting “Amazonia Beyond the Crisis: Accountability for Deforestation: Preventing Further Human Rights, Environmental and Economic Disasters”, held in New York City on 21 September 2019, immediately in advance of the United Nations Global Summit for Climate Action.

It is intended to summarise the main issues discussed in the panels, and present the main consensus outcomes, which were drafted in cooperation by conveners and key speakers.

The world’s attention has turned back to Amazonia, due to the headline-grabbing deforestation and fires crisis. Indigenous land and reserves of traditional populations are being affected. Community leaders are being threatened, intimidated or even killed. The right to health is being jeopardised by smoke. Unparalleled ecological and economic assets are being lost, and soil is being impoverished.

After declining in the middle of the past decade, the deforestation rate in the Brazilian Amazon had stabilised in recent years. However, even before the recent spike, it was still too high. Science has now showed how the Amazon forest is moving towards a dieback scenario, where the ecosystem as a whole, across a vast area, could collapse, in a vicious circle of degradation and fragmentation, if deforestation continues to expand.

Society at large - in countries that share Amazonia - no longer accepts large-scale deforestation. It has proven to be bad for the local economy, bad for biodiversity and bad for the climate at both regional and global levels. In addition, it affects the basic human rights of indigenous and traditional populations, in a spiral of threats, violence and conflict. In Brazil, a broad and diverse coalition of mainstream economic and civil society stakeholders just launched a national campaign to hold accountable those who engage in land-grabbing, crime and violence.

Despite different opinions and priorities, most stakeholders share a common expectation that medium- and long-term investments are needed, with strong, timebound commitments by the private sector, to stop deforestation and promote a diverse forest economy based on the unique biological assets of the region. There are plenty of good and successful examples of local economic activities adopting sustainable practices and relying on natural capital.

The event was designed to bring together indigenous and community leaders, scientists, business and NGO leaders from Amazonia in view of the UN Global Summit for Climate Action, to have an opportunity for exchange and to unite their voices to call on Governments, policy makers, and big business to make the significant and deep changes necessary to prevent deforestation and fires in Amazonia in the future, and to protect and promote the human rights of local people, including their right to justice and redress.

Event Program

20 September

Welcome Reception in honour of speakers and participants

West Terrace, 4th floor DDR, United Nations Headquarters, New York

- 17.00 **Accreditation and collection of badges**
- 17.30 **Reception opening**
- 17.45 **Welcome Remarks by Antonella Dentamaro**, the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation
- 18.00 **Greetings from the partners**
-

21 September

Amazonia Beyond the Crisis

The Harvard Club New York, 35 W 44th St

- 8.30 -9.00 **BREAKFAST AND INFORMAL NETWORKING**
- 9.00 – 9.15 **Trailer of the documentary “Soyalism”**, introduced by Stefano Liberti
- 9:15 – 9:30 **OPENING REMARKS**
Han de Groot, CEO, Rainforest Alliance
Niccolò Figà-Talamanca, Secretary General, No Peace Without Justice
Brenda Brito, Associate Researcher, IMAZON
Maurício Bauer, Senior Corporate Engagement Specialist, National Wildlife Federation
Jeferson Straatmann, Value Chains Coordinator, Instituto Socioambiental
-

- 9.30 – 9.45 **KEYNOTE INTRODUCTION**
Perspectives on the Crisis from 50 Years in Amazonia
Tom Lovejoy, Senior Fellow at the United Nations Foundation
- 9.45 – 10.50 **PANEL 1 - Fires As the Tip of the Iceberg: What is Really Happening?**
Part 1: The Human Rights Crisis
Ana Valéria Araujo, Executive Coordinator, Brazil Fund for Human Rights, Brazil
Maurício Yekuana, Director, Hutukara Yanomami Association, Brazil
Domingo Peas Nampichkai Achuar, Field Representative, Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuadorian Amazonia
Miguel Macedo, Specialist, Indigenous Peoples, Instituto del Bien Comun, Peru
Atossa Soltani, President of the Board, Amazon Watch
Lizardo Cauper, President, Interethnic Association for Development of Peruvian Rainforest
MODERATOR: Nigel Sizer, Chief Program Officer, Rainforest Alliance
- 10.50 – 11.45 **PANEL 2 - Can the Cattle Industry Help Curb Deforestation?**
Mauro Lúcio Costa, Rancher, Paragominas, Brazil
Laurent Micol, Director, Pecuária Sustentável da Amazônia, Brazil
Brenda Brito, Associate Researcher, IMAZON, Brazil
Maurício Bauer, Senior Corporate Engagement Specialist, National Wildlife Federation
MODERATOR: Natalie Unterstell, Director, Talanoa

- 11.45 – 12.40 **PANEL 3 - Leveraging Market Forces to Promote Sustainability**
Marcello Brito, President, Brazilian Agribusiness Association
Marina Piatto, Manager, Agriculture, IMAFLORA, Brazil
Fabiola Zerbini, Director, Tropical Forest Alliance Latin America
Jeferson Straatmann, Coordinator, Value Chains, Instituto Socioambiental, Brazil
André Guimarães, Co-facilitator, Coalition for Forests, Climate and Agriculture, Brazil
MODERATOR: Roberto Smeraldi
- 12.40 – 12.45 **Remarks**
Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo
- 12.45 -14.10 **Luncheon**
During lunch, participants have joined “Thematic Tables” addressing a specific issue for more in depth discussion, under the guidance of one or more experts.
- 14.15 - 15.10 **PANEL 4 - Fires As the Tip of the Iceberg: What is Really Happening?**
Part 2: The Environmental Crisis
Carlos Souza, CEO and Founder, TERRAS App Solutions, Brazil
Marielos Pena Claros, Forest Ecologist at Wageningen University, Bolivia
Carmen Josse, Scientific Director, Ecociencia, Ecuador
Natalia Calderón, Executive Director, Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza, Bolivia
Tina Oliveira, Coordinator, Grupo de Trabajo Socioambiental de la Amazonia - Wataniba, Venezuela
MODERATOR: Tasso Azevedo, Coordinator, MAPBIOMAS

15.10 – 16.00	<p>PANEL 5 - Beyond Impunity: Accountability, Justice, and Forest Economy Innovation</p> <p>Edel Moraes, Vice-President, Council of Traditional Populations – CNS, Brazil</p> <p>Benito Juarez, Director, Fab Lab, Peru</p> <p>Virgílio Viana, Director, Fundação Amazonas Sustentável, Brazil</p> <p>Francisco von Hildebrand, Director, Gaia Amazonas, Colombia</p> <p>MODERATOR: Niccolò Figà-Talamanca, Secretary General, No Peace Without Justice</p>
16.00 – 16.25	<p>Coffee, tea, and snacks</p>
16.25 – 17.30	<p>PANEL 6 - Beyond Crisis: What are the Priorities?</p> <p>Jeffrey Sachs, Director, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and SDG Advocate under Secretary-General Antonio Guterres</p> <p>Niccolò Figà-Talamanca, Secretary General, No Peace Without Justice</p> <p>Nigel Sizer, Chief Program Officer, Rainforest Alliance</p> <p>Carlos Nobre, Climate Scientist, Brazil</p> <p>Maurício Voivodic, Director, WWF-Brazil</p> <p>Tuntiak Katan, Vice-President, Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon Basin</p> <p>MODERATOR: Roberto Smeraldi</p>
5.30 pm	<p>CLOSING REMARKS</p>

AMAZON, BEYOND THE CRISIS

Accountability for Deforestation: Preventing Further Human Rights, Environmental and Economic Disaster

We, the participants of “Amazonia Beyond the Crisis Accountability for Deforestation: Preventing Further Human Rights, Environmental and Economic Disaster,” a convening held in New York City on 21 September 2019,

On the eve of the Global United Nations Climate Change Climate and the United Nations General Assembly, at the initiative of No Peace Without Justice, Rainforest Alliance, National Wildlife Federation, Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), Sustainable Development Solutions Network, IMAZON, The Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation;

Deeply concerned by the deforestation, fires, and other environmental and human rights violations in Amazonia and believing that the crisis happening now in the Amazon region was avoidable and therefore conscious that its repetition in the years to come is increasingly likely without concerted action at several levels to prevent it;

Stressing that continued deforestation could lead, in the opinion of globally-recognized scientists, to an irreversible dieback of the Amazon, with much of the rainforest deteriorating into a drier, fire-prone savannah ecosystem;

Conscious that systematic violations such as those that have occurred and are occurring in Amazonia are not a product of chance, neglect, or system failures, but the result of deliberate policy choices, explicit or implicit, by decision makers and at various levels;

Conscious that it is necessary for local actors to work closely with national decision makers and the regional and international community in order to prioritize resources and interventions necessary to tackle this issue;

Following enlightening and in-depth debates involving many of the most committed peoples and organisations working for the protection of the Amazonian forest and defence of human rights;

Solemnly declare:

1. While the crisis in Amazonia is of primary concern to the communities of the countries whose territory it encompasses, its protection, reinforcement, care and well-being are also of critical global interest, as it is also a crucial part of the global life-support system.
2. As such, Amazonia must be protected from deforestation, fragmentation, and irreversible degradation, and, in this regard, any initiative devoted to agricultural, mining, or industrial exploitation must be monitored to avoid any new initiatives that do not respect environmental or human rights principles.
3. It is essential to secure and protect the land rights of the indigenous people and traditional communities in Amazonia as well as to protect forests and other natural ecosystems by designating them for conservation and sustainable use.
4. It is also fundamental to provide means and resources for local communities to strengthen their capacities to manage their land and the broader environment, to ensure dignified and sustainable livelihoods and at the same time to promote their participation in the decision-making processes of strategies and solutions for the Amazon development.
5. It is essential to improve the quality and productivity of existing agricultural systems in already deforested areas; to shift public subsidies for activities connected to deforestation and human rights violations instead to conservation, restoration, and sustainable use; and to ensure that loans or investments that use public or private funds comply with environmental laws.
6. Governments must reduce the impunity of those who violate socio-environmental laws and create unfair competition with companies, groups, and individuals that are working to comply with the law.
7. It is equally important to promote a knowledge- and service-based economy (rather than expanding the extractive model) by valuing ecosystem services aligned with technological innovation and traditional knowledge, so that we can establish new businesses that promote Amazonian socio-biodiversity.

8. National, regional, and international markets should not boycott all Amazon products without discrimination. They should instead buy from sustainable sources from the region and partner with local governments and producers to assist in the transition to more sustainably producing systems.

9. It is necessary to strengthen civil society capacity to guarantee human rights; to foster national, regional, and international pressure to resolve socio-environmental issues, improve law enforcement, end impunity for socio-environmental crimes; and to extend executive resources to agencies responsible for managing public lands, protected areas, indigenous lands, and the environmental integrity. 10. Governments must take action to reverse the crisis, including not only preventing illegal fires and deforestation, but also ensuring the protection of human rights defenders and their ability to carry out their work.

11. The Amazon and the issues raised in this document require urgent attention, and to that end, we commit to remaining engaged on these issues through continuous independent monitoring of the situation, with a particular focus on how to ensure accountability and the recognition of the rights of those who contribute to sustainability efforts.

We, the participants, who in large part include representatives of those most affected by the crisis in the Amazon, ask the Heads of State and Government participating in the Global United Nations Climate Change Summit and within the UN system more broadly to endorse and implement these recommendations, which we believe are essential for averting further crises and preventing an irreversible Amazon dieback.

A large, orange, rounded rectangular shape with decorative, pointed corners on the left and right sides, serving as a background for the title.

Summary Report of Discussion

20 September 2019

Welcome Reception at the United Nations Headquarters

During the reception, Antonella Dentamaro of the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation thanked the participants and partners for their participation and commitment to the realisation of this event. She emphasized the Peretti Foundation's determination to take long-term action and help tackle Amazonian crisis issues. Their course of action was framed as cross-sectorial, as it deals with political, legal, and scientific aspects and requires the involvement of wide-ranging stakeholders: from NGOs to donors, and from institutions to citizens. Thus, committing to a threefold course of action: end impunity for those who commit crimes of this scale and scope against the environment; protect the human rights of indigenous peoples living in the affected areas; and to bring about change in the behaviour of consumers and help find new ways of conceiving the exploitation of natural resources.



21 September 2019
Amazonia Beyond the Crisis Conference
at the Harvard Club



Prior to the opening of the event on 21 September, Stefano Liberti introduced and screened the documentary “Soyalism”, which illustrates the production chain of pork and soy that endanger small-scale agriculture, our health and the health of our planet. Here, small farmers have no other choice than selling their lands. Hectares of forest are removed, and fertilizers and chemical pesticides are heavily used. The video documents how the main victims are, first and foremost, the local population that are defenceless and unable to take action.

Keynote Introduction: Perspectives on the Crisis from 50 years in Amazonia

By Thomas Lovejoy, Senior Fellow at the United Nations Foundation

Mr Lovejoy relayed that when he first started living and working in the Amazon it became clear that the creation of new highways was synonymous with spontaneous deforestation. He also explained how the rainforest recreates its own hydrological cycle. At the intersection of these two occurrences, deforestation and the hydrological cycle, is the question of how much water will be lost as the forest diminishes. In this same vein, what is happening today is more than simple deforestation. It is also increased fire usage and climate change. These effects are additionally damaging because of their cumulative effects.

This is not the first time the G7 has turned its eye to the Amazon. He suggests that a different organisation take the message of Amazonia advocacy forward. This organisation should be one that can communicate with all the nine Amazonia countries and smaller stakeholders within these areas to produce a sustainable trajectory. However, none of these plans, no matter how well formed, will work without including indigenous populations and the disenfranchised who must subsist by burning.

Fires as the Tip of the Iceberg: What is really happening?

Part 1: The Human Rights Crisis

This panel was dedicated to an analysis of what is currently happening in the Amazon. Amongst the panelists there were representatives of indigenous groups and human rights activists, who described the serious human rights violations suffered by the local populations, victims of summary executions, arbitrary detentions and crimes that go unpunished.

Ana Valeria Araujo, Executive Coordinator - Brazil Fund for Human Rights, Brazil

If we equate the human rights issues and violations to an iceberg, then fire is just the tip that is seen from above the water. The vast majority of the violations currently remain hidden from view. In the 1930s and again in the 1960s-1980s there were “development” marches through the forest. Both then and now, land occupations happen under the umbrella of state sponsorship. This government sponsorship and their attitude toward the forest is centred on economic gain and geopolitical paranoia. The prevailing thought process is that if the government is not using forest resources, someone will take it from them. Historically this “development,” which includes mining, burning, or logging, was accomplished by painting indigenous peoples as barriers to be removed. Currently, new policies are blocking protection attempts while simultaneously legitimising destructive industries, symptomatic of a new race to colonise the Amazon.

Mauricio Yekuana, Director - Hutukara, Association of the Yanomami People, Brazil

The media consistently presents indigenous people as obstacles and not legitimate guardians of the forest. We [indigenous peoples] do not take the land for granted and are well positioned to be stewards of the forest. As testament to this claim, indigenous people have many examples of how successful they are at living on the land through sustainable means. Some of the most pressing concerns for indigenous people include loss of land, pollution and water contamination, diseases for which they have no immunity, and the extrajudicial killing of their leaders by antagonist groups. Indigenous people do not want to live under these threats while simultaneously being accused of being isolationist and uncommunicative. In reality, they are communicating their concerns, thoughts and wisdom, and are making significant efforts to develop partnerships with a wide range of actors.

Domingo Peas Nampichkai Achuar, Field Representative - Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuadorian Amazonia

The problems indigenous peoples face - petroleum, mining, disease and deforestation - originates in the historical mismanagement of the forest by outside others. Yet, there is still hope for improvement. Indigenous people have gotten together and are saying “no more” in a united attempt to provide solutions and save land. However, sustainable solutions will not happen if indigenous peoples are excluded from the wider national and global conversation. Inclusive stakeholder representation is what is needed, and this must include the perspectives of children, as they will inherit these issues. Indigenous peoples want to be the bridge that spans the gap between forest conservation and the outside world.

Miguel Macedo, Specialist, Indigenous Peoples - Instituto para el Bien Comun, Peru

Dr. Macedo and his organisation develop ownership and land cover maps of the Amazon in order

to improve land management and policy decisions while simultaneously providing information to indigenous leaders so that they may advocate for themselves. The utility of this approach was demonstrated by relaying two stories of violent action against indigenous people. In both cases, which were five years apart, separate indigenous communities campaigned for recognition and legal landownership. These endeavours ended in the death of four indigenous leaders, the attempted murder of several others, and just this year six community leaders were kidnapped. There has been an established precedent of violent action against indigenous communities and periodic world condemnation, yet this pattern continues. Through the information documented in the maps, it is evident that many of the problems arising from a lack of recognition of collective rights ends up hurting individual human rights.

Atossa Soltani, President of the Board - Amazon Watch

How should the Amazonia advocacy movement respond? How could the movement build a super organism in the face of this crisis? The world's, admittedly short, attention span is focused on the tip of the iceberg but has yet to explore the extent of the violations submerged under water. Ms Soltani challenged everyone to look beneath the iceberg and consider our very model of development. To ask ourselves, if this is a successful system and who is benefiting. If solutions are to be found, they will need to be more adaptive, inclusive, holistic and creative than those of the past. Specifically, changes need to address trading relations, debt, human rights violations, murder, corruption, deforestation, expansion in oil drilling and many more. Bandaging a broken mechanism is inefficient, we must interrogate and change the system, or at the very least challenge what we define as its goals. If development and growth is the goal, how can we achieve success in less destructive ways?

Panel one closed with comments addressing “What needs to change for us to come together to form a stronger alliance, so this crisis does not continue?”

Mr. Yekuana felt that it was necessary to build relationships based on consulting.

In this vein, his organisation has produced a platform for how the government and others can communicate with indigenous populations.

Others complemented this message by calling for unity and additional alliances, especially national policies that include indigenous peoples.

Mr. Peas forcefully stated that indigenous communities know that they cannot conduct this fight alone.

The speakers felt that it is essential for the wider world to realise that the Amazon is not empty. Indigenous people are the stewards of an invaluable resource, yet they receive very little philanthropic investment for their life-plans. It is necessary to empower indigenous populations to be their own agents of change so that they may articulate their message to the wider world, engage new stakeholders and demand that that society as a whole think about the Amazon.

PANEL 2

Can the cattle industry help curb deforestation?

The second panel provided a different perspective on the issue thanks to the participation of owners of local agri-business initiatives. They stressed that strategies for conservation should take into account, and include, the views of those actors involved in production processes. This would allow for more responsible exploitation of the lands belonging to Amazonia.

Mauro Lucio Costa, Rancher - Paragominas, Brazil

Cattle production has the reputation of destroying Amazonia, but one of the roots of deforestation is couched in the more complex societal issue of poverty. Populations that currently live in poverty will continue to burn the forest as a resource until they are provided with a more viable economic option. Another aspect of the problem is real estate speculation concerning projected land-use which ill-aligns with reality. Mr Costa believes that it is a fallacy to say that more deforestation is needed in order to grow crops or for the cattle industry to survive.

Laurent Micol, Director - Pecuária Sustentável da Amazônia, Brazil

It is possible to increase cattle production in the Amazon without increasing carbon production and deforestation, with the help of additional funding. Brazilian beef production and exportation is increasing, yet an assessment of the intersection between exportation, profits and forest management shows the need for increased production in order to prevent further deforestation. In response to this need, Mr Micol's organisation is rehabilitating ranches in order to reduce the time necessary to raise cattle to slaughter weight, cut carbon emissions and provide ranchers with an economically sound income. However, to scale up this small-scale initiative, the model needs additional long-term financing with low interest rates that are locally compatible with this activity. There also needs to be more market incentives for sustainably raised cattle. Boycotting goods from the Amazon will not solve this problem. It would be more effective to give credit and buy from areas that are investing the time and money to grow/raise cattle sustainably.

Brenda Brito, Associate Researcher - Amazon Institute of People and the Environment (IMAZON)

The policies surrounding beef production are not promoting protection. There are meat packing companies that signed agreements not to buy meat from unsustainable suppliers (illegal deforesters). However, violators are not being prosecuted and some intermediary buyers are not always required to show that a cow has always been raised sustainably. It is necessary to tighten these laws in order to close loopholes; educate small producers about the ways, means, and value of sustainable production; connect beef producers to environmentalists and environmental law compliance in productive ways; and end impunity among companies by bringing them to account in a timely manner and, if necessary, punishing habitual violators.

Mauricio Bauer, Senior Corporate Engagement Specialist - National Wildlife Federation

Mr Bauer exposed the power of market initiatives to transform the supply chain. Incentives should be put in place that require action, not just inaction or avoidance. Our approaches need to include the meat packers because they have a substantial effect on curbing deforestation. If these organisations are to make meaningful change, they will need help identifying good actors from bad actors, a herculean task that should not be assigned to any one portion of the production line. Civil society and academia can contribute to this process by helping identify good actors and bring them to the forefront.

Throughout the panel,
an agreement emerged concerning having common laws within all countries
of Pan-Amazonia. These laws would be the result of consultations with all
stakeholders involved, from indigenous populations to owners of businesses.
They would not only facilitate dialogue and exchange, but also common ground to
cover issues such as deforestation, conservation, incentives, specific models
of development, business, etc.

PANEL 3

Leveraging Market Forces to Promote Sustainability

This third panel deepened the issue of business, sustainability, the environment and human rights. Though this panel represented a heavily Brazilian perspective, the assessments introduced were varied thanks to the differentiated fields and focus of the speakers' work.

Marcello Brito, President - Brazilian Agribusiness Association

It is necessary to realise that Brazil and Brazilians are attempting and making positive steps not just negative ones. These positive steps need to include and, in part, stem from the practices of large corporations. The agendas of these large companies need to align with those of conservation, not just incremental and episodic interest. Other countries are able to preserve their forests because they are making money from them and do not want to lose his income/economic source.

Marina Piatto, Manager, Agriculture - Instituto de Manejo e Certificação Florestal e Agrícola (IMAFLOA), Brazil

There is a gap between commitments not to buy from deforestation areas and actual action. There needs to be commitment and enforcement across the whole supply-chain, not just at one point. All actors in the chain need to pay and invest in sustainable production and products, otherwise it is too expensive for any one stakeholder.

Fabiola Zerbini, Director - Tropical Forest Alliance Latin America

The value-chains and supply-chains are not ready to provide the type of forest and human rights sustainability that is necessary. They need to be developed in conjunction with the Brazilians. In order to build new models, we need to move out of our comfort zone. We need to incorporate and feel the cost of deforestation in new and more internalised ways. Brazilians need to use events like this conference to produce joint solutions, where they have loud and represented voices.

Indigenous populations and traditional communities have a vast and intimate knowledge of the forest, especially as it pertains to biodiversity use, domestication and conservation. Unfortunately, the wider world economic system just takes into consideration the production of raw materials, ignoring the economical positive externalities produced by their modes of life inside their territories. The western societies paradigm about forest must understand, recognise and value this economy based on Knowledge and Services instead of a simple economy of raw material production. Without it, the "sociobiodiversity" products and services could not compete against plantations, synthetics and all predatory activities that are growing in the region.

André Guimarães, Co-facilitator - Coalition for Forests, Climate and Agriculture, Brazil

Fifty years ago, Brazil imported the majority of its consumer goods with very little exports. The decision to flip this approach was instituted because the country was losing money. Economic incentives, roads and other infrastructure were developed to address importation, all at the expense of the Amazon. Today, society in general has more information on the effects deforestation is having on the climate and the economy. It is clear that these effects are bad for both Brazil and the world. The paradigm in Brazil needs to answer how to produce more to ensure the wellbeing of the country and still reduce deforestation? It is necessary to reinvigorate/recontract the world's commitment to the Amazon because it is the heart/kidneys of the world (because it filters out so much carbon).

The panel ended with a discussion on boycotting as a short-sighted and false solution. Responsible investment across the whole supply chain would be vastly more successful. Concrete action is more difficult but will be more effective than inaction or the redistribution of sourcing, which just shifts the problem.

Boycotts are important and sometimes successful, but they have to be used in the right ways. In this instance, boycotts just lower the bar because Brazil will still sell its products, but now to potentially less respectable buyers. Boycotting may actually end up hurting the Amazon. Many of the violators are large-scale land grabbers. There need to be better ways to understand the problem in order to produce rules and policies that are effective.

Remarks, Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo - Pontifical Academy of Sciences

The Bishop thanked the organisers for putting on a conference that addressed a key challenge of our time. He reminded everyone that the next synod, which would take place from 6 to the 27 October 2019, would deal with the issues of Amazonia, deforestation, climate change and the impact on indigenous populations. He urged the scientific community, all members of civil society, business, and all stakeholders at large to keep their commitment alive on such a fundamental issue.



Discussion followed during lunch, when guests and speakers shared insights and opinions at different thematic tables

PANEL 4

Fires as the Tip of the Iceberg: What is Really Happening?

Part 2 - The Environmental Crisis

This panel focused on the environmental aspects of the crisis, and highlighted the reality and daily challenges experienced by those engaged in protecting the Amazon forest in various areas. Panelists came from different countries in the Pan-Amazonia region, namely Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Except for Dr. Marielos Pena Claros, all panelists belonged to the Amazonian Network of Georeferenced Socio Environmental Information (RAISG).

Carlos Souza, CEO and Founder - TERRAS App Solutions, Brazil

By mapping deforestation, Dr Souza's organisation can demonstrate that since 2015 there has been 40,000 new instances of forest degradation. Over the last year, this loss is equal to 260 Central Parks. Tragically, many of these areas are classified as "protected". His organisation sends new deforestation information to policing agencies when they occur in protected areas. This data can be fed into the supply chain in order to separate the "good guys" from those participating in illegal practices.

Maielos Pena Claros, Forest Ecologist - Wageningen University, Bolivia

The fires in Bolivia have affected 4 million hectares, 76 percent of which are in Santa Cruz. This area includes several different biomes, including savannas and dry forests. The negative effects on local people, the water and local fauna have been devastating. Many people have to move to new regions, which is drastically increasing the size of some communities.

Carmen Josse, Science Director - EcoCiencia, Ecuador

The aboveground carbon density in the Amazon is reducing and the Amazon forest is no longer a carbon sink. In the entire space defined as being the Amazon, 34 percent of above ground carbon is stored in indigenous territory and 24 percent in protected areas. Forty-seven percent of the total carbon loss (2003-2016) was due to human-induced degradation and natural disturbance, while the rest (53 percent) to deforestation.

Natalia Calderón, Executive Director - Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza, Bolivia

Amazonia should be seen as a collective problem and resource for all countries that house the Amazon. Amazonia is more than Brazil. In collaboration with RAISG her organisation is studying land use change in Amazonia and the trends of forest conversion for agriculture usage. She reported tragic figures on how much of Amazonia is burning.

Tina Oliveira-Miranda, Coordinator - Grupo de Trabajo Socioambiental de la Amazonia, Wataniba, Venezuela

Significant amounts of legal and illegal mining overlap with indigenous lands. Dr. Oliveira-Miranda displayed maps that indicated higher levels of deforestation associated with illegal mining in indigenous territories and protected areas. Most of the illegal mining takes place in the rivers, which leads to heightened mercury contamination and significant health problems for the populations living in those areas.

The panel concluded by noting that the current state of the Amazon region is the product of various and contrasting stakeholders, their activities and resulting effect on the environment. Yet all of these components demand positive technological transformations. All stakeholders need to create new ways for saving tracts of land. To do this, there needs to be more information on the current land use and status in order to make informed decisions. However, one reliable observation is that there will be more fires in the future.

We need to work with the communities in education programs to ensure that they have the resources to prevent fires from getting out of control. “Slash and burn” is how farmers normally clear land, making this a predictable variable.

If we want to move forward, humans need to see
Amazonia as a whole and not country by country.

We should learn from each other’s successes and failures, facilitate
open communication but also be sensitive to the differences between countries.

Conversely, making generalisations about the entire Amazon does not capture the complexity of the situation. How to, functionally account for both of these perspectives is a continuous question.

Beyond Impunity: Accountability, Justice, and Forest Economy Innovation

This panel discussed the issue of justice and responsibility for the environmental and human rights crimes taking place in Amazonia. It highlighted how each country has different legislative frameworks, and policies for the management of territories and protected zones. Speakers included representatives of local and indigenous populations and members of enterprises committed to social change.

Edel Moraes, Vice-president - Council of Traditional Populations of Amazonia, Brazil

The local communities, indigenous peoples and Quilombola peoples do an important service by demonstrating that it is possible to live with nature. However, they need capacity building since they lack many skills and tools, including the technology necessary to advocate for their own rights. Indigenous and local peoples are made invisible by processes that want them to be so. They need to be made visible, as they are struggling for the right to have rights, to exist, to contribute to legislation, to be heard. They have a right to be consulted and this cannot be seen as a hindrance to the process. The people that live in the Amazon are the most vulnerable. Indigenous peoples are not groups that need to be protected separately from the rest of the population, because they are not defending only their own human rights but the rights of all of us. Decision-makers need to re-think about the model of society they want.

Benito Juarez, President - Fab Lab, Peru

One of the main challenges is that most of the younger generation want to leave their land. Society at large needs to ask how we can protect and support something if we do not love it. The youth need to rediscover this love and attachment to their lands, as well as to be able to see their future there. With his projects, Mr Juarez's organisation tries to work on this challenge and that of integrating biological products with technology. They use different technologies in different parts of the Amazon to create different solutions for each context. For example, they use 3D printing technology to print a variety of fruit.

Virgílio Viana, Director - Fundação Amazonas Sustentável, Brazil

Dr. Viana's NGO is demonstrating that it is possible to make sustainable use profitable, to produce sustainable development through the use of resources and, at the same time, reduce deforestation. This is possible through a holistic people-centred approach and by pairing it with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This strategy involves multiple different domains, from health to environmental conservation, and from development to livelihood. A significant part of the challenge is to prevent "brain drain". The Amazon has a serious problem of youth migrating to towns, therefore their strategy focuses on engaging the youth in their communities to produce innovation. We cannot simply reject development in the Amazon, as there is a demand for jobs. What we need to focus on, instead, should be the kinds of green jobs we can have.

Francisco von Hildebrand, Director - Gaia Amazonas, Colombia

Amazonia advocates need to incorporate the approach to accountability utilised by indigenous actors, including the additional dimensions of nature and non-human elements. Indigenous communities feel that threats to the Amazon are part of a moral and environmental crisis. Accountability for these issues includes having the ability to understand the violation. His organisation works with indigenous communities to gain full recognition of indigenous municipalities and governments. Indigenous local governments and accountability involve three levels: the social element; an intercultural level; and a traditional component. This keeps the balance in the relationship to nature, politics, economy and society. Asking how to bridge the different understandings of accountability is to ask how to bring indigenous perceptions of accountability to the policy-making level.

The panel concluded by discussing accountability for whom and for what? Indigenous peoples are not waiting for an answer but are instead realising that they can provide solutions to the current crisis. There needs to be the establishment of trust, without which there is no participation and without participation there will be a dearth of quality decision-making. There must be political empowerment, because where you have strong indigenous cultures you have strong forests.

Beyond Crisis: What are the Priorities?

The last panel involved contributions from the event organisers, as well as leading experts in different fields related to Amazonia. With insights from wide-ranging experiences, the discussion developed around current necessities and long-term issues to tackle..

Jeffrey Sachs, Director - UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and SDG Advocate under Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

We need clear guidelines that are scientifically and ethically based because the practices that exist do not yet possess the necessary clarity. However, there is progress being made, including the Paris climate agreement, which established clear benchmarks and hard numbers. An agreed quantitative path, for what to do, and when is needed for us to reach our goals. Scientists need to lead this actionable pathway, with input from a multitude of stakeholders. At the moment, there is public interest in the Amazon but what are the concrete steps needed to move forward?

Niccolo Figà-Talamanca, Secretary-General - No Peace Without Justice

Deforestation and human rights abuses are not the result of a natural disaster that could not have been avoided. They were political choices that are the result of a tragic cost-benefit analysis. We need to investigate and publicly identify the drivers of these negative choices. We need to ensure accountability and tackle the issue of impunity as one of our highest priorities.

Carlos Nobre, Climate Scientist, Brazil

Warnings alone do not work. They need to be accompanied with potential solutions. He believes that sustainable sourcing is not the sole solution. We need to start valuing biodiversity and to think disruptively/outside of what we know and are comfortable with.

Mauricio Voivodic, Executive Director - World Wildlife Fund, Brazil

The priorities are to protect, to restore, and to fund. It should be a priority to 1) protect indigenous rights; 2) advance towards a vision of zero deforestation (Brazil can continue to grow without destroying the forest); and 3) promote biodiversity. The Brazilian Government and judiciary must curb the illegal activities and they have to end impunity. The private sector and individuals must get better at taking personal responsibility. Since there is no trust, if you are an organisation and you want to sell a product then prove that you are responsible.

Tuntiak Katan, Vice-President - Confederation of Indigenous Organizations from the Amazon Basin

An immense amount of economic resources earmarked to foster change and support solutions never reach the territory where they are most needed. Instead, they are lost within the bureaucratic system. The mobilisation of resources (technical, technological, financial, human) is a necessary step. Other solutions should include the recognition of ancestral knowledge. This type of knowledge is a pledge of protection for territories and forests. When such knowledge is lost, the safeguard of forests and the territory is impossible. Another solution is “healthy” development. Indigenous peoples have been perceived and depicted as an obstacle to development, however we could change the distribution of resources. We should see the indigenous economy as a holistic concept and ask what positive externalities derive from switching resources for extractive activities to resources for indigenous territories.

Nigel Sizer, Chief Program Officer - Rainforest Alliance

Funding for scientific studies in the Amazon is not as robust as it needs to be. There must be a significant increase in funding. Simultaneously, we must condemn large-scale illegal deforestation while also helping the poor who are burning by providing other economic pathways. A very important component is addressing supply-chain insufficiencies. We need to hold companies that have made commitments accountable and those who have not signed on need to have consequences.

The sixth and last panel concluded that indigenous populations are no longer resisting alone, new alliances are forming and emerging.

Amazonia advocates call themselves by various names but the potential for a more united front is here and it is more mobilised.

We need to turn this momentum into an alliance.

Moving forward we, the organisers, need to start looking for where are the levers that can be pulled to help induce change and plan for how to avoid having this same conversation next year. Soon the dry season will end, the fires will not be so intense and attention will wane.

We must not lose this momentum.



On behalf of the organisers Brenda Brito (IMAZON) thanked all speakers and participants and read out the major elements that had emerged as outcomes of the Conference, which would be incorporated in an Outcome Document reflecting the consensus that emerged from the discussion.



***For further information,
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