

Innovative approaches to sustainable development are being pursued in the Brazilian Amazon, but some fundamental economic questions remain

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DEFORESTATION continues in the Amazon. As Minister of Environment, this is not something I'm pleased about, but it's the reality. As the agricultural frontier expands, the forest retreats and the Amazonian economy grows. This is the development model being employed in the Amazon; until realistic new models can be devised, this process will continue inevitably.

What are the options? Let's look at the 'demand' in many developed countries for tropical forest conservation. Several concerns lie behind this, including the loss of biological diversity and worries that deforestation releases carbon into the atmosphere and thereby contributes to global warming. Thus, the tropical forests of Brazil and many other tropical countries perform services that are valuable to the global community, particularly carbon storage and biodiversity conservation but also the maintenance of water quality and many other services.

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Few tropical countries can afford on their own to meet the costs of the global services performed by their forests. Unfortunately, the only apparent way for such countries to receive remuneration for their forest resources is through predatory use—logging in an unsustainable way, clearing it for agriculture, or both.

One way that tropical countries may eventually be able to meet most of the costs of the global services performed by their forests is to develop their economies; as countries become wealthier they have more resources to devote to conservation. It would seem reasonable that rich countries would be able to assist this by allowing free trade.

Regrettably, this is not generally the case. The agricultural subsidies that are applied by

many wealthy countries, especially the European Union, Japan and the United States, damage the ability of developing tropical countries to earn export revenue from their agricultural products. Recently it was estimated that the USA and the EU together subsidise their agricultural sectors to the tune of about US\$300 billion per year. Due to this, the prices that developing countries can obtain from agricultural exports are half what they were 20 years ago; logically, if you only get half the price you need to farm double the area of land—so another incentive for deforestation arises. That's why I find the rhetoric of many developed countries about 'poverty alleviation' in developing countries somewhat strange. International trade is dominated by the largest economies and often acts in contradiction to the anti-poverty rhetoric. It is increasingly obvious that without some fundamental changes in the economic order, the term 'sustainable development' is simply an empty slogan.

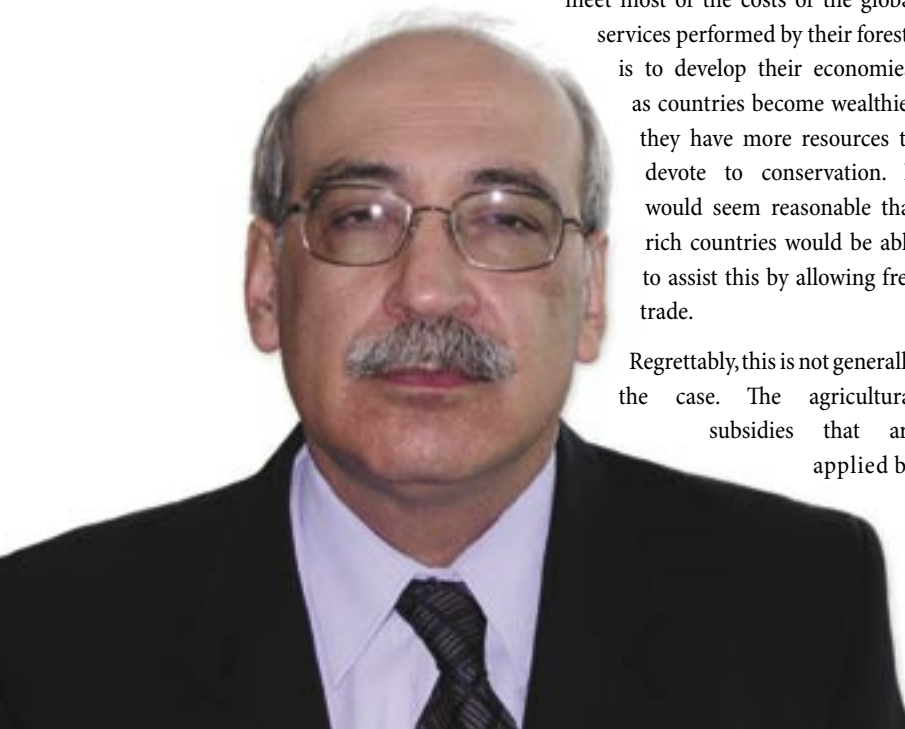
What's being done

Nevertheless, it's not all doom and gloom. In Brazil we are doing our best to bring about sustainable development in the Amazon. I am the first forestry professional to head up the Ministry of Environment in Brazil, which has a broad mandate for environmental and forest policy in Brazil. In the previous three years I was Executive Secretary (Vice-minister) and in that capacity I coordinated forestry issues.

We have seen some significant advances. In 2000 we created the Brazilian National Forest Program (NFP) after a broad consultation involving civil society, the private sector and academia. At the institutional level, we created the position of Secretary for Forests and Biodiversity and a directorate within IBAMA (the Brazilian Institute for Environment and Natural Resources) to oversee the implementation of NFP policies at the federal level.

Activities are starting now that will have a major impact at the field level. For example, the Ministry of Planning recently approved a proposal made by the Ministry of Environment to create a US\$200 million credit line with the World Bank to encourage improved land management practices such as agroforestry in small- and medium-scale family agriculture in close partnership with the private sector. This loan is now being discussed with the World Bank.

We are also strengthening law enforcement. For example, twenty states now have their own forest police responsible for enforcing forest laws. In the last few months we have apprehended 30 000 m³ of illegally harvested mahogany from indigenous lands in the Amazon. These efforts are important to validate those logging companies that are operating legally; honest enterprises should not be penalised by the existence of illegal operations. If sustainable



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development is to have any meaning, we have to provide an investment environment to preserve the competitiveness of companies that operate within the law.

Another area of forest management in which Brazil has made significant progress relates to fire control. Brazil has one of the best forest fire monitoring programs in the tropics and we have recently increased operational capacity for fire prevention and combat in the Amazon and in conservation units throughout the country; in the last two years we have reduced the incidence of forest fire in conservation units by 86%. Our firefighting capacity is coordinated nationally by IBAMA and supported by the armed forces and a taskforce using air transport. We can now move 500 bombeiros (firemen based in Brasilia) to any point in Brazil within 48 hours. Simultaneously we are building local-level networks of firefighters to prevent and combat fires.

Economic alternatives

Such institutional reforms are important, but they are not enough: it is essential to create economic alternatives for the sustainable use of resources. We want to change the classical model of development in the Amazon; for this reason the federal government abolished SUDAN, the entity traditionally charged with promoting development in the Amazon. In its place we are creating another body called the Agency for the Amazon, with the purpose of fostering sustainable development using new economic models. This agency will be responsible for a fund of regional development and has the purpose of reorienting public investment to stimulate economic activities such as ecotourism and sustainable forest management based on the sustainable use of natural resources. There is a huge potential to generate employment without deforestation. For example, the Brazilian government recently established a centre for biotechnology research and development in the Amazonian city of Manaus, is the largest of its kind in Latin America and will search for and help develop forest biodiversity products in the pharmaceutical, cosmetics and food industries. Ecotourism is also being promoted through a US\$200 million project supported by the InterAmerican Development Bank. And we are investing in ecological and economic zoning in order to organise the agricultural frontier.

Fair and equitable

The fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources and traditional knowledge is a critical issue for the national government. A new national law aims to resolve it. The main component of this Act is a regulation relating to the sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources and traditional knowledge associated with the letter and spirit of Article 8j of the Convention on Biological Diversity. We have formed a commission to oversee its implementation.

International cooperation

I hope I have adequately conveyed the idea that the Brazilian government, in cooperation with many civil-society actors, is working hard to bring about sustainable development in the Amazon. But it is clear to me that international cooperation is essential to complement these national efforts, especially in the development of remunerative sustainable forest management regimes. ITTO is one organisation capable of backing up its words with action, but it can and should do more to support sustainable forest management and certification and to combat illegal logging and illegal trade. Through the pages of this journal, I hereby launch an appeal for these fundamental forest issues to be placed at the top of the Organization's agenda and for more resources to be put at its disposal.

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Hazy view from World Summit

The World Summit on Sustainable Development ended on 4 September to mixed reactions. While UN officials called it a success, many non-governmental organisations labelled it a failure.

The main outcome of the Summit was a Plan of Implementation, a 27 000-word document agreed by most participating governments to guide future efforts towards sustainable development.

The main commitment contained in this document is to halve the number of people without access to sanitation and safe drinking water by 2015. Countries also committed themselves to establish a 'world solidarity fund' to eradicate poverty and promote social and human development in developing countries. However, contributions to this fund will be voluntary.

On certification, countries agreed to develop and adopt, where appropriate, on a voluntary basis, effective, transparent, verifiable, non-misleading and non-discriminatory consumer information tools to provide information relating to sustainable consumption and production. This agreement contains the proviso that such tools "should not be used as disguised trade barriers".

Among the forest-related initiatives announced during the Summit was the Congo Basin Forest Initiative, in which ITTO is a partner. The goal of the partnership is to promote economic development, poverty alleviation, improved governance and natural resource conservation

in the region through support for a network of national parks and protected areas, well-managed forestry concessions, and assistance to communities. The US government pledged US\$53 million over the period 2002–2005 to help implement the partnership. An Asia Forest Partnership was also announced. ITTO hosted a side-event at the Summit to highlight some of the progress that has been made towards sustainable forest management through its project program. Details of this side-event can be found at www.itto.or.jp/inside/current_news/aug27_2002_success.html

The contentious issue of agricultural subsidies was discussed but not resolved at the Summit.

Claiming a successful outcome, Summit Secretary-General Ntini Desai said in a press release that: "It's impossible to know just how many resources the Summit has mobilised, but we know they are substantial. Furthermore, many of the new resources will attract additional resources that will greatly enhance our efforts to take sustainable development to the next level ..."

In contrast, a press release from the World Wide Fund for Nature reported that: "the Plan of Implementation will not provide significant movement forwards from commitments made in Rio and since. ... The meagre outcome of the meeting is also a consequence of some countries' conscious efforts to prevent the Summit from agreeing new targets and timetables."

Report by A. Sarre