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# What can Global Governance do for Forests?

## Cooperation and Sovereignty in the Amazon

Adriana Erthal Abdenur







Adriana Erthal Abdenur is co-founder and Executive Director of Plataforma CIPÓ, a Brazil-based think tank dedicated to issues of governance, climate and peace in Latin America and the Caribbean. She is also a Senior Fellow (Non-Resident) at United Nations University Center for Policy Research.

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# Executive Summary

Global governance mechanisms and frameworks for forest governance – the set of policy, legal and institutional frameworks for international decision-making on forests – have multiplied and diversified over the past two decades. However, perhaps more than any other area of climate and environmental issues, reaching a binding global commitment to forests has remained elusive. As a result, the role of global (and regional) governance in promoting sustainable forest management and conservation remains piecemeal: scattered across a broad gamut of frameworks, mechanisms, principles, and recommendations, none of them legally binding. What does this fragmented landscape mean for the world's tropical forests?

This paper hones in on the case of the Amazon Basin, with a specific focus on the Brazilian Amazon, to analyse the relevance and effectiveness of global governance instruments (including regional mechanisms) in preventing activities defined under national laws as illegal deforestation and other environmental crimes and in promoting more sustainable approaches to forest areas. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rates of deforestation in these areas have worsened, fuelled by a combination of rising commodity prices, lax government oversight, and increasing repression and violence against environmental defenders in many parts of the world.

In the absence of a binding global forest convention that holds governments accountable to the international community, this report argues that individual countries remain free to pick and choose which instruments to abide by, or (as in the case of Brazil) whether to do so at all. In face of the deepening ecological crisis, the inability to stop governments from adopting predatory approaches to the exploitation of forest resources undermines global efforts to protect our planet. In the absence of strong binding commitments, hope of reversing the ongoing forest destruction and degradation in the Amazon rests with the ability of international actors to harness and engage with three promising spaces – new regional efforts, emerging protagonism by subnational governments, and cross-sectoral coalitions.

To boost these three areas of hope, the following measures are recommended:

- Promote regional cooperation, including through the ATCO, in forest protection and in the development of more sustainable approaches to the Amazon. The UN Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) can provide evidence-based inputs for realistic goals. One underexplored area for regional cooperation is in law enforcement and prevention of environmental crimes, for which bodies like the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Interpol may provide valuable external inputs and capacity-building.
- Strengthen South-South Cooperation among Amazon countries, but also foment interregional exchanges with other States with large tropical forest areas, such as those of the Congo Basin and Borneo. The UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)'s Climate and Sustainability programme can play an important role in defining priority areas and partnerships.
- Develop more cooperation initiatives that engage with subnational governments, both at provincial and municipal levels. Pre-existing networks, such as the C40 Cities network of mayors, should be harnessed and built upon. Donor countries and development agencies concerned with forest protection should also invest in projects and programmes that either enlist or are led by provincial and city governments.
- Dedicated spaces for subnational leadership and coalitions should be created at key environmental and climate spaces, including the UNFCCC and Convention on Biodiversity Conferences of the Parties. Such spaces can be used to foment innovative cooperation among subnational entities, as well as with civil society and private sector actors.
- Ensure inclusive participation by both civil society and private sector actors in key decision-making spaces at the global and regional levels, not only COPs but also important landmarks such as the Stockholm+50. Special attention should be paid to Global South participation, especially by indigenous groups and other traditional peoples of the forest. Efforts that promote exchanges and collaboration across sectors should also be prioritized.

- *Our Common Agenda*, and in particular efforts around the goal of Protecting Our Planet, can serve as an important accelerator for cooperation around tropical forests, including the Amazon, but discussions and initiatives should be framed in ways that do not elicit excessively rigid discourses of national sovereignty. Related initiatives should clarify that international cooperation for forest protection can increase States' capacity to address the socioenvironmental and climate repercussions of deforestation rather than undermine their policy autonomy.

# Introduction

In the case of the Brazilian Amazon – the world’s largest tropical forest – large-scale deforestation, violating national laws and other environmental crimes, have taken place since at least the late 1960s. In Brazil, construction of the first major highways cutting across the dense forest made once-remote areas more accessible, fuelling destruction and degradation of the tree cover. Despite major political changes over the next half century, Brazil never abandoned the top-down, “juggernaut” style of development in its Amazon territory. This vision of development in the Amazon, heavily reliant on the idea of modernization, has prioritized the implementation of large-scale infrastructure, the predatory exploration of resources such as timber and minerals, and the “occupation” of the Amazonian space in ways that have led to widespread environmental degradation and destruction. Moreover, this heavy-handed approach to development in the region has consistently led to the obliteration of the livelihoods of indigenous and traditional communities, and – even beyond the Amazon Basin itself – increasingly contributes to climate change<sup>1</sup>. Although the Amazon is frequently mischaracterized as the “lungs of the planet” – research<sup>2</sup> has debunked the oft-repeated claim that the region produces 20 per cent of the planet’s oxygen – there is no doubt that its relevance to socioenvironmental and climate well-being reaches far beyond the basin itself, and even beyond Brazil’s borders.

The transnational impacts and relevance of the Amazon Basin pose dilemmas for global and regional governance. Despite the recognized need to complement national and subnational efforts for sustainable forest management and conservation with cooperation, international efforts have repeatedly run up against a series of (mostly political) barriers. Most important of these is the long tradition of leaders in Amazon country invoking the concept of national sovereignty with respect to their territories. As a result, after a brief period (2004-2012) in which deforestation was dramatically curbed, even as agricultural productivity in the Amazon increased, Brazil has reverted to rampant deforestation<sup>3</sup>. The Government of Jair Bolsonaro from 2019-present has further defied a number of global forest governance norms.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, there is an unprecedented sense of urgency among policymakers, researchers, and activists around the ecological crisis in Brazil and abroad. The perception has grown that deforestation, including in the Amazon, leaves a vast trail of destruction with consequences far beyond the region itself. This has led to new attempts by foreign governments, consumer groups, and international organizations to pressure governments such as that of Brazil to adopt more sustainable approaches to forests. The most recent such attempt took place at the end of the 26<sup>th</sup> Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), when almost 140 countries announced the Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests,<sup>5</sup> including a strongly worded (but entirely voluntary and unenforceable) pledge to collectively halt deforestation by 2030.

In light of these dynamics, what can global governance do for sustainable forest management and conservation in regions like the Amazon? In this report, the author draws on interviews with forest governance experts and advocates, as well as analysis of official documents and statistics to analyse the relevance and impact of key global governance instruments in the Amazon Basin. The report focuses on the dynamics in Brazil, not only because the country encompasses the majority of the Amazon Forest (approximately 60 per cent) but also because, from a political perspective, Brazil is often seen as being a major stumbling block in the effort to promote effective and sustainable forest management and conservation. Analysing a country in which major reversals have taken place can help to shed light on the uses and limitations of global governance for forests.

This report argues that the absence of a binding agreement on forests continues to severely curtail the effectiveness of international cooperation in the Amazon region. Instead, the fragmentation of global forest governance – within and outside the United Nations (UN) system – leaves it up to individual national governments whether to adopt recommendations and/or selectively implement associated policy models. As the case of Brazil shows, this has led to the pell-mell adoption (and discarding) of loose norms and recommendations, opening up the possibility of significant slowdowns, even dramatic reversals, despite

a multitude of efforts by civil society in Brazil and by the international community to exert pressure. Although a global forest convention is not a panacea for the complex, intertwined issues around forests, it is fast becoming *a sine qua non*: its absence undermines global efforts to protect our planet in face of the deepening ecological crisis.

In the absence of strong binding commitments, hope of reversing the ongoing forest destruction and degradation in the Amazon rests with the ability of international actors to harness and engage with three promising spaces – new regional efforts, emerging independent actions by subnational governments, and cross-sectoral coalitions.

The report is structured in three parts: part one offers an overview of global forest governance, including recent developments such as the commitments made at COP26; the second part analyses key experiences and gaps in international cooperation in the Amazon Basin, as well as the specific role of Brazil; and the third part identifies three areas in which international cooperation in the Amazon could be built: regional spaces, subnational government, and cross-sectoral alliances.

# Global Governance and Forests

## Seeing tropical forests for the trees

Forests are vital to life on Earth. These key ecosystems cover approximately 30 per cent of the Earth's land area<sup>6</sup> and offer a variety of vital ecosystem services and goods, including absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, regulating the supply of water, and maintaining the quality of air, water, and soil. Worldwide, forests provide food, shelter, energy, income, and medicines for around 1.6 billion people, or 25 per cent of the human population<sup>7</sup> – not counting the resources those biomes provide indirectly, such as fresh water and clean air. Some forests play an essential role in global environmental and climate stability and, therefore, to human health and security. Forests are also essential in providing solutions to both mitigate and adapt to climate change. Forests are also home to over half of all terrestrial species.<sup>8</sup>

Despite scientific advances in understanding the importance of these biomes – and, consequently, of the risks generated by their loss – they are increasingly under threat. Every year, a forest area equivalent to the territory of the United Kingdom is lost due to forest destruction and degradation.<sup>9</sup> Most of this activity is taking place in tropical rainforests of the Global South and in the boreal forests of northern Eurasia. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rates of deforestation in these areas have worsened, fuelled by a combination of rising commodity prices, lax government oversight, and increasing repression and violence against environmental defenders in many parts of the world.<sup>10</sup>

Today, most deforestation is happening in the tropics. Tropical rainforests, known for their vast, closed canopies and gigantic trees, are located roughly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn across parts of Asia, Australia, Africa, South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Pacific Islands. Together, rainforests comprise around 80 per cent of the world's documented species, although these forests cover only about 12 per cent of the planet's surface (about 1.84 billion hectares), or 3.6 per cent of the Earth's total surface.<sup>11</sup> The largest tropical forests are the Amazon (around 629 million hectares as of 2020); the Congo Basin (about 301.2 million hectares); Australasia (124.1 million hectares); and the Indo-Burma region (160.3 million hectares).<sup>12</sup>

Tropical forests are believed to store at least 250 billion tons of carbon, and deforestation and degradation in these areas represents approximately 8 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions from human activities.<sup>13</sup> If tropical forests were a country, it would be the world's third top emitter of such gases.<sup>14</sup> A 2017 study estimated that tropical forest degradation led to annual emissions of 2.1 billion tons of carbon dioxide, of which 53 per cent were derived from timber harvest, 30 per cent from wood fuel harvest, and 17 per cent from forest fires.<sup>15</sup> Tropical forests are perhaps the most endangered habitat on Earth and the areas most vulnerable to deforestation. Each year, some 140,000 square kilometers of tropical forests are destroyed in these areas. Because of rampant deforestation, the planet features only half of the forested area of just a few decades ago.<sup>16</sup>

Most large-scale tropical forests straddle international boundaries. The Amazon, for instance, covers part of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela, as well as the French overseas territory of French Guiana. The world's second-largest tropical forest area, in the Congo Basin, extends across parts of no less than ten countries: Angola, Gabon, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zambia. The rivers that cut across these areas (such as the Amazon River and the Congo River) also cross international borders, as do the airborne hydrological processes that help to maintain the rainforest.

Tropical forests are also transnational in the sense that illegal deforestation is fuelled in part by high demand from overseas, including rich countries, for commodities (such as grains, beef, and minerals) that place direct pressure on forest areas. As Pendrill et al. have noted, deforestation is “embedded” in traded



goods between countries, and high-income countries have been the largest “importers” of deforestation, roughly 40 per cent of it.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, rather than being contained within individual countries, most large-scale tropical rainforests are either transnational spaces or shaped by transnational dynamics. Therefore, forests require, as a vital complement to national and subnational responses to deforestation, transnational solutions through international cooperation.

## From global treaty to a loose toolkit

Forests are sometimes presented as global commons – a loose and oft-disputed term used to refer to spaces beyond national jurisdictions, or more broadly to international, supranational, and global resources in which common-pool resources are found.<sup>18</sup> Yet, in comparison to areas of international policymaking such as climate change, biodiversity, and desertification, forests have been notoriously difficult to frame under global governance.

In 1992, at the Earth Summit (the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, or UNCED), UN Member States debated proposals for global conventions on these topics. Two comprehensive treaties emerged out of the discussion: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). A third, pre-existing convention, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), acquired greater momentum as a new, integrated approach to desertification was adopted at the Summit. In contrast, a Global Forest Convention – one of the major international cooperation proposals on the table in the Rio de Janeiro summit – failed to materialize. This was in great part due to opposition from developing countries, through the Group of 77 and China, to the way that forest issues were being framed over the course of the discussions.<sup>19</sup> At that time, the major political barrier to a global forest convention ran along South-North lines.

Although a forest treaty was not reached, the summit yielded some foundational documents for forest management and conservation, including the “Forest Principles,”<sup>20</sup> an initial list of principles for global forest governance that laid the foundation for international cooperation around forest issues. The principles assert the right of nations to profit from their own forest resources, but they recommend that this should take place within a framework of forest protection, management, and conservation. The principles cover, for instance, the roles of major stakeholders, such as women and workers; means of implementation, including financing and technology transfer, and international legal instruments.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the relevance of Agenda 21 to forests was highlighted by many Member States,<sup>22</sup> an important landmark in the understanding of forests as an important means through which to achieve key UN frameworks (later this also included the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]).

The decision to settle for a list of principles rather than a binding treaty signalled the start of a long (and ongoing) path of negotiating non-legally binding arrangements. From the Forest Principles emerged other sets of frameworks, recommendations, and policy toolkits – but no robust instruments holding governments accountable for deforestation. The Database of Global Forest Arrangements, developed by Plataforma CIPÓ and UN University Centre for Policy Research, has mapped major landmarks in global frameworks and instruments for forest management.

Another outcome of the Earth Summit was that new policy spaces had to be created to continue discussions around forests since, unlike the three conventions that were either signed or boosted in Rio de Janeiro, forests lack recurring events such as Conferences of the Parties and other institutionalized channels for discussion, follow-up, participation, and awareness-raising.

The first such space for forest issues, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), emerged from the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which had been set up in 1992 to promote follow-up discussions on the summit’s key topics. The IPF’s work concentrated on the implementation of

specific decisions made through UNCED on forests, trade, and environment, and relevant international legal mechanisms. Yet, divides continue to emerge between rich countries and developing ones. Even as the North pressured the South for more conservation commitments, developing countries demanded greater concessions on financing and technology transfer from rich ones. Despite this gap, one important outcome of the panel's work was the National Forest Programmes (NFPs). The NFPs are national planning frameworks (still active in over 160 countries) and they represent the type of forest solution that global governance could generate in light of the absence of a binding treaty: an array of recommendations, best practices, and planning instruments that Member States could adopt at their discretion.

One downside of this pick-your-solution type of approach is that it yielded highly variable results, for instance due to inadequate participation or the perception that NFPs were too donor driven. Second, such instruments tended to be strictly sectoral and, as such, inadequate for tackling the transnational dynamics and consequences of illegal deforestation as well as other drivers of forest destruction and degradation.<sup>23</sup> And third, such tools serve as a weak basis for international cooperation, instead concentrating attention on what individual States can do.

The IPF met four times from 1995-1997 and was then disbanded. Discussions were then taken up within the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), established in 1997. Although some progress was made on the normative framework for cooperation around forests, once again Member States proved unable to reach a compromise on a global forest treaty by the end of the Forum three years later. Yet again, the prospect of formal negotiations ended up being frustrated by political resistance by key States. Discussions then shifted yet again to another venue, the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF), established in 2000 to build on key milestones of international forest policy, including the first UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030, which provided a global framework for actions at multiple levels to halt deforestation and forest degradation.

Although the UNFF has universal membership (that is, it is composed of all UN Member States and specialized agencies), the lack of progress towards comprehensive binding commitments, especially in light of the parallel advances in negotiations over climate, biodiversity and desertification fields, brought to light some of the limitations in inter-State, consensus-based negotiations over forests. At the same time, States were losing their uncontested primacy in forest governance issues. Environmental movements were fast expanding regionally and globally, and the lack of a rigid convention allowed room for non-State actors – including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, universities, research institutes, activist networks, community organizations, and (eventually) progressive private sector actors to participate more directly in global policy debates on forests. However, the lack of COPs has meant that this participation has mirrored the decentralized, multilevel configuration of international cooperation for forests.

Indeed, the idea of a forest treaty had given way to a “toolkit” approach featuring a flexible menu of recommendations, frameworks, and mechanisms, including market-inspired solutions. If, on the one hand, this approach precluded binding commitments, it also opened up space for eclectic solutions. The resulting gamut of proposed responses include everything from market-based and government-driven approaches, to cooperation channels that can be harnessed on an *ad hoc* basis.<sup>24</sup>

## Global and regional frameworks

The forest-specific toolkit does not represent the entire set of international instruments in global governance that are relevant to forests – there is a plethora of broader global governance frameworks that are highly relevant to their sustainable management and conservation. In fact, recognition of their relevance to forests has increased dramatically over the last few years as the ecological crisis intensifies. For instance, all three conventions that emerged from the Earth Summit contain clauses and mechanisms for forest protection. The UNFCCC, as well as the major agreements that followed it – especially the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement – call for forest protection as a key mechanism for climate mitigation, and the topic has been given increasing prominence in COPs, including the most recent. The CBD specifies forest

management and protection as key implementation tools for biodiversity conservation. And finally, the UNCCD references forests as essential to the restoration and recovery of fragile ecosystems and to the well-being of those who inhabit them.<sup>25</sup>

In 2000, the ever-changing (and ever-growing) set of acronyms that serve as landmarks in global forest governance came to include the IAF - the International Arrangement on Forests, which was adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its objectives were to promote the implementation of internationally agreed-upon actions on forests at the national, regional, and global levels; to provide a global framework for policy implementation; and to implement the Forest Principles and outcomes of the IPF/IFF. One result of the IAF has been to open up more channels for involvement by specialized UN agencies. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), for instance, began developing a toolkit to help connect national forest and farm producer organizations to climate change finance at a global level, and to expand its role (that dates back to 1948) in assessing the world's forest resources.<sup>26</sup> New regulatory frameworks were also launched, including Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), which was later broadened into REDD+.<sup>27</sup> REDD+ seeks to make forest preservation more attractive from an economic standpoint through a financial incentive for carbon storage. In return, countries are paid for verified emissions reduction and removals, whether through a market-based mechanism or a government-based one. In essence, REDD+ has tried to generate large-scale financing for global forest conservation and climate mitigation, but this has been hindered by the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>28</sup>

With the 2015 adoption of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, forests came to be viewed more clearly in the UN system through a development lens. The SDGs are understood to represent vital guidelines for the promotion of sustainable approaches to forests. For instance, in SDG 15 – “Life on Land,” Member States committed to “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.” Other SDGs are also relevant. Under SDG 6 – “Clean water and sanitation,” for instance, Target 6.6 calls for protecting and restoring “water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, a broader understanding of forests and their interconnections with different aspects of society, the economy, and climate makes several others SDGs important tools in policy planning for forests, including SDG 1 – “No hunger,” SDG 3 – “Good health and well-being,” and SDG 12 – “Responsible consumption and production.”

All of the loosely interconnected norms, frameworks, principles and mechanisms focusing on forests are complemented by a variety of international regimes, agreements, pacts and coalitions that have accumulated over the decades. Sotirov et al. classified International Forest Governance Arrangements into six main categories: (1) Global multilateral treaty regimes (State actors, hard law); (2) global non-binding multilateral agreements (State actors, soft law); (3) transnational regulatory governance (State and non-State actors, hard law); (4) transnational public-private partnerships (State and non-State actors, soft law); (5) transnational non-State market driven governance (non-State actors, private regulation); and (6) transnational private sector governance (non-State actors, industry self-regulation).<sup>30</sup>

There are also regional governance arrangements either built around forests specifically, or that bear directly on their management and conservation. For instance, the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) and the Congo Basin Forest Partnership have served as platforms for regional cooperation around the Congo Basin; in 2021, the Pan African Forest Certification was created to establish a regional certification scheme for timber.<sup>31</sup> More broadly, the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have also fostered regional cooperation for forests. The AU Commission has been working with regional forest commissions to develop instruments such as an Africa Regional Strategy on REDD+ to serve as a guideline for AU member States and RECs.<sup>32</sup> ASEAN has issued regional frameworks such as a voluntary code of conduct on imports for forest and timber companies.<sup>33</sup>



In South America, as explained below, regional mechanisms such as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization have been beset by a lack of mutual trust among member States and by excessively rigid discourse of national sovereignty.

These different instruments – global and regional – overlap in many ways, and either together or separately they offer possibilities for engaging Member States in cooperation and/or applying pressure on them. Whereas binding agreements provide mechanisms for enforcing the rules, the effectiveness of implementation can vary when there is a lack of indicators and adequate monitoring mechanisms. On the other hand, non-binding commitments – which predominate among forest-related arrangements – tend to be more comprehensive, but they are also easier to break when the policies and guidelines of a national government contradict the objectives of that instrument. This trade-off has changed over time, as the ecological crisis deepens; as humanity nears a point of no return, it becomes more “costly” to the planet to allow room for disengagement from global forest norms and commitments. The wildly varying levels of adherence to the toolkits, principles and recommendations reflects the difficulty in promoting coordinated and effective implementation of those ideas and goals.

These lessons have come into sharper focus with the issuing of loose pledges by Member States – and the reactions they have elicited. In 2014, through the New York Declaration on Forests<sup>34</sup> – a voluntary and legally non-binding agreement – some 40 countries announced their intention to halve tropical deforestation by 2020, and to halt it altogether by 2030. However, just five years later, a report found that deforestation not only continued at breakneck speed but had actually increased significantly since the pledge was announced. The assessment concluded that the New York Declaration had failed,<sup>35</sup> contributing to what some analysis has deemed the “lost decade” for tropical forests.<sup>36</sup>

Despite this failure, or perhaps because of it, a similar pledge was made at COP26 in November 2021. Although many more countries (137 at the COP26, and 141 as of December 2021) signed the Glasgow agreement than its New York predecessor, the new announcement was centred on a similar pledge. Signatories in Glasgow jointly committed to “halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation.” The Declaration also specified a number of commitments to the sustainable management of forests and more transparent supply chains, among other forest-related issues. Such loose declarations lack enforcement mechanisms, benchmark and monitoring processes, and they do not make clear provisions for participation by civil society and the private sector. In essence, they underscore the glaring absence of a global forest convention and the thirty-year path from that proposal to a hodgepodge assortment of norms and tools.

# Cooperation and Mistrust in the Amazon Basin

## The Amazon: a central concern

Because the Amazon Basin encompasses roughly half of the remaining tropical forest in the world, it is a central concern to global forest management. The region contains the world's largest rainforest, stretching across 5.5 million square kilometers, an area greater than the European Union. The Amazon is also a hotspot of illegal deforestation and other environmental crimes. In Brazil, where approximately 60 per cent of the Amazon rainforest is located, deforestation and degradation rates – as well as the incidence of fires caused by human activity – hit a 12-year high in 2021. This trend continues even as recent studies show that, for the first time, the Amazon rainforest now releases more carbon than it stores.<sup>37</sup>

**Figure 1. Brazil's Legal Amazon**



Brazil's Legal Amazon – an area formed by the states of Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima, Tocantins, and Mato Grosso, in addition to municipalities in the state of Maranhão – is home to 23 million people (out of an estimated 36 million for the entire Amazon). According to the latest census data in 2010, approximately 433,000 indigenous people live in the Legal Amazon, most of them in the country's 725 Indigenous Lands (*Terras Indígenas* - TIs).

The Legal Amazon population also includes major metropolitan areas, such as Manaus (1.4 million) and Belém (1 million). For local populations in both rural and urban areas, environmental crimes like illegal deforestation, induced forest fires, illegal logging, and illegal mining are strongly associated with negative impacts on well-being, including poor health outcomes, loss of jobs and income, destruction of traditional means of subsistence, forced displacement, and sharpened inequalities, among other problems.<sup>38</sup> Environmental crimes also undermine opportunities to promote sustainable development in the Amazon through the maintenance of a standing forest.

In addition, environmental crimes like illegal deforestation and forest degradation are often linked to other criminal activities, such as arms and drug trafficking, human trafficking, and corruption and money

laundering, which – combined with disputes over natural resources – in turn have led to rampant violence in the region.<sup>39</sup> For instance, in the Yanomami Indigenous Land in Roraima – a state on the Brazilian border with Venezuela – police have been investigating the provision of illegal weapons to gold miners by militias.<sup>40</sup> Organized crime factions specializing in illicit drug trade negotiate cocaine for illegally extracted timber.<sup>41</sup> Many of the municipalities with the highest murder rates in Brazil are located in the Amazon, especially in states such as Pará, which has a very high incidence of environmental crimes such as land invasions, illegal logging, and illegal gold mining. According to a recent study, if the Brazilian Amazon were a country, in 2017 it would place fourth highest in the world for homicides.<sup>42</sup>

Until the mid-20th century, there was no large-scale deforestation in the Amazon. While indigenous groups did alter the forest landscape, for instance through the creation of Brazil nut groves, they co-existed with the forest in ways that maintained the trees standing. The colonization process, through which vast expanses of Amazon Forest were violently occupied by settlers and incorporated into what would become Brazil, introduced new territorialist concerns and economic cycles in the Amazon. In the late 19th century, with Brazil already an independent State, a rubber boom, fuelled by the Industrial Revolution, triggered waves of migration to the region, especially from north-east of Brazil.

It was under Brazil's military regime from 1964-1985 that the government began to implement large-scale infrastructure projects, starting with roads that cut across the dense forest, and later hydroelectric dams and mines. These projects attracted large numbers of unskilled migrants from elsewhere in Brazil, most of whom found themselves unemployed once works on the roads had finished. Left with few other options for income, and in light of the lax regulations on land occupation and use, land invasions began taking place. At first, this occurred at a smaller scale, as low-income groups established small subsistence farms, especially along small roads perpendicular to the highways, in a pattern that came to be known as the “fish spine” pattern.<sup>43</sup>

Starting in the 1970s, as more roads opened up access to previously remote areas of the forest, land speculators, wealthy farmers and businessmen, timber extractors, and others began organizing large-scale invasions, deforestation, and induced forest fires. The Trans-Amazonian Highway, officially designated BR-230 and now over 4000 km cutting across the Amazon as well as the Cerrado (savannah) region, opened up large swaths of the Amazon to timber traders. The Government actively encouraged these activities, not only through policies but also through pro-deforestation campaign promising incentives such as tax exemptions for investors willing to finance these activities.<sup>44</sup> Despite the presence of hundreds of thousands of indigenous people in the region, the military dictatorship adopted the motto “land without men for men without land.”<sup>45</sup> Over the subsequent decades, a succession of amnesties granted to land invaders, and lax law enforcement of these and other environmental crimes, helped to fuel large-scale deforestation in the Amazon.

At the same time, the military regime invested heavily in militarizing the Amazon, especially border areas, while invoking the concept of national sovereignty. Heavy expenditures in this militarization were justified with reference to vague ideas about foreign powers coveting the riches of the Amazon and therefore constituting threats to the integrity of the Brazilian territory. The Amazon came to be viewed as a “strategic vacuum” where the risks of “internationalization” ran high.<sup>46</sup> The idea of a foreign invasion of the Amazon or of Communist infiltration became one of the cornerstones of the Brazilian military view of the region.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, although Brazil's foreign policy alignment with the US wavered over the years, its leaders never prioritized relations with other South American countries, perpetuating mutual distrust and undermining prospects for bilateral as well as regional cooperation.

The tension between sovereignty and cooperation that has characterized Brazilian military thinking about the Amazon was also evident in the creation of the Amazon Treaty Cooperation Organization (ACTO), founded in 1978 by the eight Amazonian countries – Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela – all of which had signed the Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT). The agreement aimed to reinforce the sovereignty of member countries over the region while providing for collaboration



to promote scientific and technological research and the rational use of natural resources, among other purposes.<sup>48</sup> However, since then the balance has always tipped in favour of sovereignty. As a result, the cooperation frameworks developed through ACTO have had difficulty being translated into actionable workplans.

Although Brazil has since undergone several political changes, many of the policies promoted by the dictatorship have been maintained by governments even after the transition to democracy in the 1980s. The Workers Party (PT) Governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff gave continuity to major infrastructure projects in the Amazon, especially the massive Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in the Xingu Basin in Pará. As recently as 2021, even as Lula condemned the ongoing environmental devastation taking place during the Bolsonaro Government, he rebutted suggestions of an international intervention in the region by asserting that “the forest is Brazilian” and underscoring the importance of national sovereignty in the region.<sup>49</sup> Such statements are a stark reminder that a strong nationalist stance also underpins left-leaning political thought in Brazil, and that this is especially true where the Amazon is concerned.

## **The Amazon during the Bolsonaro Government**

Despite those similarities, the environmental policies promoted by Brazil’s Governments – and their impacts – have varied over time. The 1990s and 2000s brought updates to key environmental laws and some innovations, especially a revamped Forest Code and the new Environmental Crimes Law (1998), and the Lula Government from 2003-2011 oversaw the only period in which the Brazilian Amazon experienced a reduction in deforestation, even as agricultural productivity increased.<sup>50</sup> And while some drivers of deforestation in the Amazon are historical, others can be attributed to Brazil’s policies and bills put forth that promote and even attempt to legalize environmental crimes.

The Jair Bolsonaro Government from 2019 has taken steps that are seen to have weakened some key State environmental institutions, especially those in charge of forest monitoring and protection and those tasked with protection of indigenous peoples. The dismantling of the main federal institutions tasked with monitoring and protecting the forest, such as the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Energy (Ibama) and the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio),<sup>51</sup> has led to considerable relaxation of law enforcement and prevention of environmental crimes. There were, for instance, significant reduction in the number of Ibama inspectors, and numerous reports of political persecution of staff who worked towards forest conservation.<sup>52</sup> The Ministry of Environment was allocated its smallest budget in two decades, with a cut of 27.4 per cent in 2021 compared to the previous year.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the severe impacts on indigenous communities (whose lands are being invaded at unprecedented levels by speculators, farmers, gold diggers, and loggers), this wave of institutional dismantling has four important institutional effects. First, it has severely weakened the technical capacity of the State agencies responsible for environmental preservation, from data analysis to field operations. Second, it has led to a significant reduction in human and financial resources (combined with their misuse) allocated to the environmental area. Third, it has engendered major setbacks in transparency and social participation. And finally, it has generated mistrust among institutions and with respect to foreign partners, undercutting ties for collaboration and cooperation.

This process has accompanied the issuing of dozens of presidential decrees and the introduction of new legal bills meant to further weaken existing environmental regulations – or unravel them altogether.<sup>54</sup> For example, Bill 510/2021, supported by the Agribusiness Caucus in Congress (*Bancada Ruralista*), would make it possible for public lands that have been illegally deforested to become the property of invaders. By paving the way for privatization even of recently cleared areas, precisely at a time when the Amazon is undergoing new peaks in illegal deforestation and degradation, this measure would effectively reward land grabbing and encourage the destruction of vast stretches of primary forest.

Instead of building on pre-existing institutions, Bolsonaro has called on the Armed Forces, especially the Army, to take over forest monitoring and deforestation prevention functions previously led by specialized civilians. The resulting operations have proven resource-heavy and have produced no significant impact on illegal deforestation and other environmental crimes. In fact, the channelling of resources to exceptionalist actions led by actors with no experience in curbing deforestation is illustrated by Bolsonaro's enacting a Law and Order Guarantee (GLO) operation – typically invoked for public security purposes – to try to contain deforestation in the Amazon. Since 2020, the federal Government spent USD 5.3 billion (about BRL 30.2 billion) on Operations Brasil Verde I and II, led by the Vice President Hamilton Mourão, a reserve general.<sup>55</sup> Despite deploying 3,400 military personnel and drawing on a monthly budget equivalent to the annual expenditure allocated by the Bolsonaro Government to environmental inspection bodies, the two operations have not proven effective. In 2021, deforestation rates in the Amazon reached their highest level in 12 years.<sup>56</sup> Other instances of securitization and misallocation of resources included the government purchase, without public tender, of a soil monitoring satellite (considered by experts to be ineffective in monitoring deforestation) at a cost of approximately USD 30 million (BRL 175 million).<sup>57</sup>

In addition, transparency in the monitoring of the Amazon Forest has been eroded, through changes in the communication protocols of environmental agencies; threats to staff members; added levels of confidentiality for public documents; and blackouts in official environmental databases.<sup>58</sup> The legitimacy of public research institutions, especially the National Space Research Institute (INPE), which runs the satellites that monitor deforestation, has also been challenged.<sup>59</sup> This has been accompanied by the widespread appointment for middle and high-level positions of individuals (especially from the military ranks) who lack technical knowledge and experience in the environmental area and/or who are closely associated with the interests of large landowners.<sup>60</sup>

The Government is seen to be promoting the interests of its supporters, namely agribusiness, logging and mining sectors (the primary drivers of deforestation in the region). Bolsonaro has defended his policies in the Amazon, not only before domestic audiences but also in regional and global meetings such as the UN General Assembly and COP26.<sup>61</sup> He has upheld his policies in the Amazon even as his first Minister of the Environment, Ricardo Salles, resigned after an investigation was launched by the federal Supreme Court for reported environmental crimes, more specifically for favouring the timber sector by breaking laws in order to regularize timber shipments seized abroad.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, space for participation by civil society organizations (CSOs) has been severely reduced, especially because of the suspension or extinction of councils attached to environmental agencies.<sup>63</sup> NGOs working in the climatic and environmental areas have also become the target of misinformation and threats, not only from the far right but also from some government officials.<sup>64</sup> For example, in 2019 the headquarters of the NGO Saúde e Alegria, which has worked for more than three decades promoting socioenvironmental development in the Santarém region (in the state of Pará), were invaded by the Civil Police, who apprehended equipment and documents without judicial authorization. On the same day, four members of the Alter do Chão Brigade, including an NGO official, were arrested by the Civil Police of Santarém for suspected involvement in the forest fires that occurred in the region – accusations that have been classified as “unfounded” by some human rights organizations.<sup>65</sup> There have also been repeated efforts in the legislative space to criminalize organized civil society. In 2021, a special commission was created within the Chamber of Deputies to discuss a proposal to expand the Antiterrorism Law (Law No. 13,260) in ways that could be applied to social movements.<sup>66</sup>

At the same time, environmental and human rights defenders are increasingly under attack. In 2019 alone, 24 environmental defenders in Brazil were murdered, four more than in the previous year, and 90 per cent of the attacks occurred in the Amazon.<sup>67</sup> In response to the high rates of targeted violence and the widespread impunity, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, criticized the rampant deforestation, the accelerated dismantling of institutions in charge of environmental control, and attacks against activists and journalists in Brazil.<sup>68</sup>

Despite mounting pressures from civil society and from consumer groups, the private sector has also not taken the types of transformative action that is necessary. While a growing number of business stakeholders, both in Brazil and abroad, advocate for more sustainable practices in accordance with environment, social and governance (ESG) principles,<sup>69</sup> not all actors adopt these norms or do so in meaningful ways. However, the impact of these initiatives on reducing deforestation remains limited while environmental crimes and attacks on environmental defenders remain.

Meanwhile, Bolsonaro's foreign policy, which has been characterized by some analysts as open contempt for multilateralism and international cooperation, including its regional aspects, presents additional hurdles to cooperation in the Amazon.<sup>70</sup> The Government's positions at the UN, which Bolsonaro's first foreign minister referred to as a "globalist Marxist conspiracy,"<sup>71</sup> and in other international fora have isolated Brazil in many areas of international norms-setting and policymaking, precisely at a time when many other countries are joining forces to curb the effects of the climate emergency.

Although government officials have often claimed, at home and abroad, that Bolsonaro's approach to the Amazon has led to decreased deforestation, evidence from official sources, such as INPE, shows that the opposite is true. Between August 2020 and July 2021, the deforestation rate in the Amazon surpassed 13,000 square kilometers – the highest number since 2006, when measurements began.<sup>72</sup>

## Coercion, cooperation and sovereignty

The strong and negative impact of Bolsonaro's policies on the Amazon has prompted a range of strategies by non-Brazilian actors, though most have struggled to gain traction. For example, the Amazon Fund, a pooling of resources from Norway and Germany for the prevention of illegal deforestation and the promotion of sustainable development in the region, and totalling some USD 1.2 billion (BRL 2.9 billion), has been suspended by the donor States in response to the Bolsonaro Government's vetoing the broad participation of civil society in the governance of the fund.<sup>73</sup>

Other current and potential cooperation arrangements, spanning multiple sectors, have also been affected by political tensions over the Bolsonaro Government's environmental policies in the Amazon. The European Union – in part, pushed by consumer groups concerned with how deforestation affects international supply chains – has tried to link sustainability and human rights more clearly to the Mercosur-EU Trade Agreement, which has also stalled in great part due to enlarged public opposition to the deal in Europe. In addition, the current rates of environmental destruction in the Brazilian Amazon are seen as a hurdle to Brazil's entry into the OECD.

Several countries have also tried to apply pressure individually. The Bolsonaro Government has come under sharp criticism – including from France, Germany and at the UN – for soaring rates of illegal deforestation and forest fires induced by human action, not to mention the explosive growth of other environmental crimes in the region, from illegal logging to illegal gold mining.<sup>74</sup> References to rainforests of the Global South as global common goods (a phrase included in the UN Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda*<sup>75</sup>) were not viewed favourably by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>76</sup> At the 2019 meeting of the G7, French President Emmanuel Macron referred to the Amazon as a common good and called for mobilization of the seven global powers that make up the coalition against deforestation in the region.<sup>77</sup> Bolsonaro responded sharply that Macron knew nothing about Brazil.<sup>78</sup>

When Germany's Angela Merkel suspended resources earmarked for forest protection due to the increased rates of deforestation in Brazil, Bolsonaro suggested she should "take the money and reforest Germany."<sup>79</sup> While the US Government refrained from criticizing Bolsonaro during the Trump Administration, since the election of President Joseph Biden, government officials have been more outspoken about deforestation in Brazil, although their criticisms of Bolsonaro's policies in the Amazon have abated considerably as the US pursues other areas of cooperation with Brazil, including a defence agreement and economic ties.<sup>80</sup> At COP26, Brazil came under renewed pressure from the conference organizers, who opposed Jair Bolsonaro



giving a speech at the conference, given his government's track record on deforestation. In the end, Brazilian officials signed the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, though it is non-binding.<sup>81</sup>

Criticisms by external actors of Bolsonaro's environmental policies in the Amazon have prompted prickly responses, often including a resurgence of nationalist mottos like "The Amazon is ours."<sup>82</sup> While the discourse of national sovereignty was also mobilized by his predecessors, the particular variant espoused by the Bolsonaro Government presumes that international cooperation – rather than boosting national capacity for policymaking – undermines Brazil's autonomy and threatens its sovereignty. Although there has never been an invasion of the Amazon since Brazil became a formally independent State in 1822, many among the ruling elites still envision foreign powers as coveting the resources of the Amazon and forever awaiting the chance to invade the region. In contrast, Bolsonaro – who has derived considerable support from the business sector – directs far less criticism at transnational companies based abroad and operating in the Amazon; their presence, however, is viewed less favourably by left-leaning groups, including within the Workers Party.

Bolsonaro also hearkens back to the military dictatorship to invoke the idea of leftist conspiracies based in the Amazon. For example, in 2008, Vice President Mourão stated that an "articulation by the global left against the Bolsonaro Government" was pushing ideas on sustainability in the Amazon which, he argued, pose threats to Brazil's national sovereignty. He dismissed criticisms of the Bolsonaro Government's environmental policies as part of "a propaganda effort by the international community against the country."<sup>83</sup>

In a rare (albeit fleeting) instance of the main opposition figure agreeing with the Bolsonaro Government, when Macron referred to the Amazon as a global commons, Lula affirmed that "the Amazon doesn't belong to France, it's not international, the Amazon belongs to Brazil, and therefore it has to exert sovereignty over [this region]."<sup>84</sup> In this respect, Brazilian leaders are not alone. The discourse of national sovereignty is also frequently mobilized by Heads of State elsewhere in the Amazon region, such as Colombia and Venezuela. The concept is invoked even when international cooperation is being promoted. For instance, in October 2021, Colombian President Iván Duque met with Bolsonaro to announce a joint effort with Brazil to preserve the rainforest within the sovereignty of the Amazon countries.

These efforts have failed to produce results, not only due to the political landscape in Brazil but also because of a lack of binding commitments that would allow for enforcement. This includes the type of cross-sectoral conditionalities that actors such as the EU have belatedly tried to impose on Brazil in light of the rampant destruction and degradation taking place in the Amazon Forest. In essence, the absence of a global treaty on forests makes the costs of breaking with global and regional forest far too low. In light of these reversals, what then can the tools of global governance do for the Amazon? The next section turns to three "spaces of hope" that might provide momentum for adherence to existing frameworks and norms.

# Three Potential Spaces for Cooperation

## Regional governance and the Amazon

Traditional regional organizations in Latin America have long faltered, due to a combination of lack of trust, inadequate political commitment to regional arrangements, and the countries' falling back to the discourse of sovereignty. This is especially true of the Amazon subregion. ACTO, founded in 1998, was the first multilateral organization specifically dedicated to multidimensional cooperation in the Amazon space. The headquarters, however, was established far from the Amazon itself – a decision that reflected the deeply entrenched vision, common to South American leaderships, of the Amazon as being a remote frontier to be exploited through top-down policies filtered through a geopolitical lens rather than approached from local perspectives and bottom-up decision-making. Although ACTO has issued frameworks and initiatives, it has proven sluggish, bogged down by mutual distrust among member States.

During the 2000s, the construction of regional arrangements with relevance to the Amazon benefited from a new emphasis given by Brazilian foreign policy to South-South cooperation and, in the South American context, to regional integration, especially under the Lula Government from 2003-2011. In addition to infrastructure projects, which incorporated the private sector – at times with lavish financing from the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) – technical cooperation was expanded with other countries in the region, with a focus on public policies in areas such as education, health, and agriculture. At the multilateral level, new initiatives, including the 2008 launch of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) offered new spaces for the negotiation of themes relevant to the Amazon. For example, within the scope of UNASUR, seminars were organized that addressed the creation of systems to monitor events such as deforestation and transnational crimes in the region.<sup>85</sup> However, as previously mentioned, progress on regional cooperation through the ACTO was tempered by the continued adoption of the discourse of national sovereignty. In addition, in the late 2010s, Brazil's role in promoting South-South cooperation in the region was deflated by a combination of changing political priorities and a series of major transnational corruption scandals involving Brazil-based companies and government officials around the region (including former Heads of State, as in the case of Peru<sup>86</sup>).

Often, when institutionalized arrangements in Latin America and the Caribbean (among them, ACTO) become paralysed due to political disputes or lack of commitment, cooperation initiatives are undertaken through *ad hoc* arrangements. These configurations have also emerged around the Amazon. For example, in 2019, after a new peak in induced forest fires in Brazil and Bolivia, seven countries got together to sign the Pact of Letícia for the Amazon, with Colombia playing a leading role in the negotiations. Among its 16 objectives are the creation of an Amazon cooperation network in the face of natural disasters and actions to strengthen the capacities of women and indigenous peoples.<sup>87</sup>

Aside from State-led cooperation arrangements, international cooperation in the region has also included efforts with civil society organizations at the helm. The immense impacts of the infrastructure projects implemented starting in the 1970s mobilized environmental activists from the region and abroad in defence of the Amazon rainforest and its inhabitants. In addition to advocacy, such transnational networks have produced important data and analyses. For example, the Amazon Environmental Information Network (*Rede Amazônica de Informação Georreferenciada - RAISG*), created in 2007 by universities and civil society actors from all Amazon countries, produces interactive maps and reports.<sup>88</sup> However, unlike in areas such as climate change, biodiversity and desertification, these groups find difficulty in participating in forest-centred debates due to the lack of regular and highly visible negotiation and participation spaces, such as COPs.

One potentially promising space in which State and non-State actors could better engage around forest issues is the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, known as the Escazú Agreement. This Latin American arrangement, signed in 2018

by 24 of the 33 region's countries, includes dialogues with various civil society actors, with emphasis on the work of youth and UN bodies, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Escazú includes specific obligations for Latin American States – thus, encompassing the Amazon countries – to guarantee the safety of environmental defenders and access to environmental information by groups in situations of vulnerability. It also features measures aimed at strengthening public participation in environmental decision-making processes in general. Finally, in accordance with Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), it highlights the importance of free, prior and informed consultations with indigenous and traditional communities – a major issue given the continued adherence to large-scale infrastructure construction in the Amazon.

After two major regional players – Argentina and Mexico – ratified the Escazú agreement in 2021, it entered into force, generating legal rights and obligations for the 12 ratifying States. With most of its neighbouring countries having signed the agreement, Brazil has become even more isolated in the region's institutional innovations. As of January 2022, Brazil has not yet ratified Escazú. If a future government decided to participate in the agreement, it would provide significant impetus to the initiative and could open up possibilities for more concrete cooperation in the Amazon.<sup>89</sup>

## Subnational governments

A second potential “space of hope” for international cooperation in the Amazon – and, more broadly, for the region's engagement with global governance – emerges from the growing activism of subnational governments, especially in Brazil. Although historically paradiplomacy by states and municipal governments in Brazil has been largely complementary to official foreign policy,<sup>90</sup> the relationship between a number of states and Brasília have been more conflictive in recent years. Initially, tensions arose over public health issues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Bolsonaro Government attempted to stop individual states, such as Maranhão, from obtaining personal protection equipment (PPE) and other medical materials from abroad.<sup>91</sup>

In light of the controversies surrounding Bolsonaro's environmental policies, this emerging initiative by state governments in international cooperation quickly expanded into the climate and environmental spaces. In 2019, governors from nine Amazon states formed an alliance – the Interstate Consortium of Governors of the Legal Amazon – and participated together at COP25 in Madrid in an effort to promote the development of the region “without environmental degradation.” They followed up by also taking part directly in COP26 in Glasgow. That same year, a coalition of 21 Brazilian governors, acting independently from the federal Government, proposed a partnership to the US Government aimed at environmental protection, with a focus on decarbonization. Although there has been some scepticism regarding the core intent behind the coalition, whose governors have actively sought resources for infrastructure, the group has stated that its core objective is forest preservation.<sup>92</sup> In addition, there have been initiatives by individual states in the Amazon. The government of Pará, acting independently, created the Fund for the Eastern Amazon, an instrument of private collaboration to achieve environmental goals in the state.

Because most global and regional governance frameworks and tools remain heavily centred on national governments, there are limitations on the extent to which subnational governments can become protagonists in international cooperation. However, since the Brazilian Constitution treats the subject with ambiguity – leaving space for a degree of autonomy – paradiplomacy by individual subnational governments or by coalitions of states may provide additional space for promoting sustainable approaches to the Amazon under two conditions: first, that they are able to coordinate and consolidate such alliances; and second, that international frameworks better accommodate subnational governments.

## Networks and intersectoral coalitions

For more than thirty years, civil society organizations have worked in and for the Amazon rainforest by forming networks of national or international scope. Over the past few years, they have also begun to engage in new intersectoral coalitions. In some cases, these arrangements are formed in opposition to an initiative. For instance, the Brazilian Front Against the European Union-Mercosur Agreement brings together more than 100 organizations that oppose the ratification of the pact on the basis of its potential socioenvironmental and human rights impacts. But cross-sectoral coalitions have also emerged to propose new approaches. In 2020, the Parliamentary Environmentalist Front, in partnership with the SOS Mata Atlântica, an NGO, and the Association of Municipal Environmental Bodies (Anama), launched a platform aimed at building an environmental agenda for cities during the municipal elections held that year.

In addition, there are instances in which civil society organizations, politicians, and private sector actors have joined forces. The Brazil Coalition for Climate, Forests and Agriculture (*Coalizão Brasil Clima Florestas e Agricultura*), officially launched in June 2015, has become one of the largest cross-sector alliances in Brazil. It brings together entrepreneurs, agricultural producers, ranchers and civil society organizations to implement initiatives aimed at reducing greenhouse gases and promoting a low-carbon economy. By fostering dialogue and promoting networked solutions, these cross-sectoral coalitions partly compensate for the broken communications channels across institutions and sectors, and thus also represent a promising space for engaging with global and regional governance for forests.



## Recommendations

Given the fragmented nature of global forest governance, especially in light of the failure to reach a global convention along the lines of the Earth Summit treaties, the three “spaces of hope” outlined in the previous section may offer new momentum to international cooperation in the Amazon. However, transforming their potential into more ambitious and sustained commitments to forest preservation and conservation will depend not only on political willpower, but also on the capacity of international actors – among them, the UN system – to seize emerging opportunities.

To boost these three areas, the following measures are recommended:

- Promote regional cooperation, including through the ATCO, in forest protection and in the development of more sustainable approaches to the Amazon. The UN Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) can provide evidence-based inputs for realistic goals. One underexplored area for regional cooperation is in law enforcement and prevention of environmental crimes, for which bodies like the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Interpol may provide valuable external inputs and capacity-building.
- Strengthen South-South Cooperation among Amazon countries, but also foment interregional exchanges with other States with large tropical forest areas, such as those of the Congo Basin and Borneo. The UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)’s Climate and Sustainability programme can play an important role in defining priority areas and partnerships.
- Develop more cooperation initiatives that engage with subnational governments, both at provincial and municipal levels. Pre-existing networks, such as the C40 Cities network of mayors, should be harnessed and built upon. Donor countries and development agencies concerned with forest protection should also invest in projects and programmes that either enlist or are led by provincial and city governments.
- Dedicated spaces for subnational leadership and coalitions should be created at key environmental and climate spaces, including the UNFCCC and Convention on Biodiversity Conferences of the Parties. Such spaces can be used to foment innovative cooperation among subnational entities, as well as with civil society and private sector actors.
- Ensure inclusive participation by both civil society and private sector actors in key decision-making spaces at the global and regional levels, not only COPs but also important landmarks such as the Stockholm+50. Special attention should be paid to Global South participation, especially by indigenous groups and other traditional peoples of the forest. Efforts that promote exchanges and collaboration across sectors should also be prioritized.
- *Our Common Agenda*, and in particular efforts around the goal of Protecting Our Planet, can serve as an important accelerator for cooperation around tropical forests, including the Amazon, but discussions and initiatives should be framed in ways that do not elicit excessively rigid discourses of national sovereignty. Related initiatives should clarify that international cooperation for forest protection can increase States’ capacity to address the socioenvironmental and climate repercussions of deforestation rather than undermine their policy autonomy.

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