



Climate Profiles : Climate Brazil

Brazil Climate Change Profile Part 1: Pioneer by Accident

South America's biggest country is the unchallenged biofuels leader, and no other industrialized country emits less CO₂ to produce energy. But with miles of rainforest lost every day, Brazil's climate record is still less than perfect.



Picture Gallery (click on the picture to start)

How has Brazil's approach to climate change evolved since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro? (Photo: Reuters)

Brazil might be the birthplace of international cooperation against climate change. Fifteen years ago, a landmark United Nations conference in Rio de Janeiro helped put the problem of global warming on the international agenda. It was at this conference - also known as the "Earth Summit" - that over a hundred nations agreed to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, a treaty aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Since then, however, Brazil has become one of the biggest sources of concern about global warming. The ten years after the Earth Summit saw unprecedented destruction of the Amazon rainforest, which is so vital to the Earth's life-supporting carbon cycle that it has been dubbed the "lungs of the world." And like other large developing countries, the Brazilian government refuses mandatory cuts on its growing greenhouse gas emissions, which it sees as threatening national development.

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But gradually and almost unwittingly, Brazil has built an impressive renewable energy industry. Since the mid-1970s, the country's ethanol industry has matured to the point that it now fuels up to 40 percent of all Brazilian automobile transportation with non-petroleum biofuel. Meanwhile sugar cane-based ethanol fuel is poised to become one of Brazil's most important exports. Brazil has also embraced hydroelectric power as a primary source of the country's energy, though many decry

large-scale dams for their negative environmental and social impacts.

But to really reduce carbon dioxide emissions, Brazil will have to reign in deforestation, which accounts for up to three quarters of the country's total greenhouse gas emissions. According to government sources, the deforestation rates in the Amazon have already slowed by around half since 2004. Brazil's government credits this sharp decline to policy measures and crackdowns on illegal logging. Others cite falling prices of soy and commodities that are often planted on deforested land.

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