



Climate Profiles : Climate Brazil

Brazil Climate Change Interview Forests as a Basis of Economic Growth

Brazil is a renewable energy leader and is getting a handle on its deforestation problem. Paulo Moutinho of the speaks about the climate change challenges that South America's biggest country still faces.



Paulo Moutinho, coordinator of the Amazon Institute for Environmental Research (IPAM)

Can Brazil consider itself an international leader in addressing climate change?

Brazil is an international leader in terms of renewable energy. Around 60 percent of our energy matrix is based on hydrological power. We have flex-fuel cars using any combination of ethanol and gasoline, and now there is a possibility to produce other biofuels.

On the other hand, Brazil emits enormous amounts of carbon into the atmosphere due to Amazon deforestation. Seventy-five percent of Brazilian emissions come from deforestation. The challenge for Brazil is to change from the current development model (forest is a barrier to economic development) to a sustainable one (forest conservation is the basis of economic growth). Brazil has all the conditions to promote this change. In this sense, Brazil is a leader. But like other tropical countries Brazil needs some type of compensation from the international community to do that.

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Protecting the Amazon Rain Machine

The government has recently come out with statistics showing a sharp decrease in the rate of deforestation. Are these statistics reliable, and will this trend continue?

The statistics are totally reliable. The monitoring system of deforestation implemented by the Brazilian government's National Institute for Space

Research (INPE) since 1988 can be considered the best monitoring system in the world. The system is also open for effective social control, predicting participation of NGOs and independent groups on the data analyses.

However, the deforestation is dropping due to a mix of factors: enforcement of the plan for deforestation control in Amazonia, direct actions of federal agencies and state governments, and lower prices for commodities like meat and soy on the international market. The effect of governmental control of the deforestation rate has increased a lot during the last two years.

A recent New York Times article said the Brazilian government has changed its approach to climate change due in part to increasing public pressure. Do you notice this as well?

That's true. The Brazilian government is more open to discuss issues related to climate change than in the past. There are a lot of forums and networks in Brazil promoting debate on deforestation and climate change. For example, we have an indigenous forum on climate change with several NGOs working on this issue. The National Congress initiated an important debate on the national policy for climate change and the federal government is elaborating a national plan to face the climate problem.

Does this mean that the Brazilian government could accept mandatory caps on greenhouse gas emissions?

Maybe in the future. We need to first create favorable conditions for developing countries to promote reduction of their emissions before we talk about mandatory caps to them. Also, developed countries need to provide evidence that they will reduce their own emissions.

What are some of the biggest opportunities for Brazil with regard to climate change?

The biggest opportunities are not related to the Clean Development Mechanism or biofuels, but rather to the forestry sector. Brazil is demonstrating it's possible to establish a national program to control its emissions from deforestation. The challenge is to find a mechanism in the national and international scenario to compensate for deforestation reduction and forest conservation.

There are some movements in Brazil going to this direction. For example, the Alliance of Forest People has requested from the government a specific policy for conservation of indigenous land and extractives reserves considering the threat of climate change. The policy would include the compensation for forest conservation. Some states - Mato Grosso and Amazonas - are planning to implement mechanisms of payment for environmental services, including deforestation reduction.

The Brazilian national congress has discussed a national policy for climate change that would include mechanisms of compensation for forest conservation and avoided deforestation. The Brazilian government proposed a mechanism of positive incentives for countries that promote

deforestation reduction in their territories. There is now discussion under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to find a mechanism to compensate developing countries for deforestation reduction. That's a good signal.

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