

Preface

In over 50 years, the Brazilian Amazonia has experienced man-made destruction of natural resources and the livelihoods of the Indigenous population. In the 1970s, the Military Government granted private capital almost unlimited access to rain forest areas in the planning region *Amazônia Legal* with generous financial incentives, after the state-led colonisation of landless people remained unsuccessful. The exploitation of the Amazon's ecosystems for the extraction of mineral resources, large-scale livestock farming and national integration measures was carried out without regard for the Indigenous people and regional socio-ecological vulnerability, contrary to the warnings of scientists and NGOs.

Tropical biodiversity and Indigenous areas were seen as obstacles to economic progress. The government's neglect of sustainable development and the inadequate coordination of state and private projects at federal, regional and local level led to high subsequent costs and robbed the marginalised population of their livelihoods.

Later governments have also implemented administratively inefficient and socio-ecologically damaging mega-programmes (including the Grande Carajás programme and hydropower plants with large reservoirs) with disastrous environmental impacts.

The internationally funded Pilot Programme to conserve the Brazilian tropical rain forests (PPG7) started some significant environmental policy improvements for sustainable development but was not deepened by follow-up programmes. Extensive infrastructure projects (including the Cuiabá–Santarém highway) aimed at a conservative modernisation and attracted southern Brazilian soybean farmers, whose activities also expanded into the humid savannahs in the south-east of the region. The often violent conflicts of interest between the social actors operating on the pioneer front remained unresolved and Indigenous territories, conservation units and protected areas remained at risk.

During the Bolsonaro government, deforestation increased rapidly and environmental institutions were brought to a virtual standstill. Violence and chaos became omnipresent.

Tropical forest ecosystems are a huge CO₂ reservoir. To date, around 20% of the Brazilian rain forests have been cleared, mostly illegally, and a further 20% are severely degraded. A socio-ecological transformation process and good local governance are only just beginning to emerge. The elimination of violence, illegality and corruption is still outstanding. The demand from industrialised countries for the supply of cheap raw materials and agricultural commodities is endangering *Amazônia Legal* without bringing any added value for the majority of its 28 million inhabitants.

The new government of Lula da Silva is facing the great challenge of a fundamental turnaround with the final renunciation of deforestation and the goals of sustainable development and environmental justice in Amazonia.

Large-scale destruction of biodiversity, rising temperatures and instability of precipitation not only pose a threat to the region, but also cause global impacts related to climate change. Over the last two decades, Amazônia Legal has evolved from a CO₂ sink to a source of CO₂ emissions. A deforestation rate of 20–25 % marks a tipping point at which rain forests will turn into non-forest ecosystems (humid savannahs). This “point of no return” could be imminent.

The publication *The Brazilian Amazonia in change* by Jan M.G. Kleinpenning (Professor of Human Geography of Developing Countries at the University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands) and Gerd Kohlhepp (Professor of Economic and Social Geography; formerly Latin American Research Centre at Tübingen University, Germany) is organised in two volumes:

Vol. 1: **Jan M.G. Kleinpenning:** *The Brazilian Amazonia in change I. Opening up and colonisation in the 1970s*

Vol. 2: **Gerd Kohlhepp:** *The Brazilian Amazonia in change II. Five decades of exploitation, deforestation and attempts at sustainable development*

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