



five challenges

by Carlos Minc

The threat of deforestation is one of the greatest problems facing Brazil. About sixty per cent of its land, across six different biomes, is covered by forests. And society is increasingly recognising their value, whether it be for the biodiversity they contain, the social functions they provide, the goods they can generate to meet peoples' needs, or the invaluable environmental services, such as regulating the climate, that they bestow upon humanity.

The first, and main challenge confronting the country is to continue trying to achieve a consistent and permanent reduction in deforestation in all six biomes and especially in Amazonia. Since President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's government began, the rate of deforestation in the Amazon has fallen by a total of 59 per cent. As a result the country has avoided emitting more than 500 million tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere over this period, equivalent to 14 per cent of all the reductions that developed countries have to make by 2012. Nevertheless, deforestation has returned to an increasing trend since mid 2007. This demands more rigid measures from the government.

Reducing deforestation and thus reducing CO₂ emissions is one of the most important contributions Brazil can make to mitigating climate change. This challenge will gain even greater impetus late this year with the establishment of the Amazon Fund, a voluntary investment fund to combat deforestation and promote the sustainable use of forests, which will be

based on resources provided by countries, businesses and institutions proportionally to emission reductions. The initiative has developed the concept of giving positive incentives for cutting emissions from deforestation, using the Amazon as an example. The Norwegian Government has already declared its intention to make the first significant donation and we hope to attract additional resources to conserve the Amazon and demonstrate the viability of the positive incentives mechanism presented by Brazil at the meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The second challenge is to plant a million hectares of forest a year by 2011. This target takes into account not just the known demand for traditional forest products, but considers the future potential for new kinds of products with added value. Between 2003 and 2007 the annual area planted grew from 320 to 630 thousand hectares and the share of small producers grew from 8 per cent to 25 per cent of those who planted forests: the aim is to achieve 30 per cent in 2011.

The third challenge is to increase the area of natural forest under sustainable forest management from 3.5 million to 15 million hectares, and the best bet seems to be forest concessions — arising from the Public Forests Management Act, sanctioned in March 2006 — and community forest management.



The first forest concession will be in the National Forest of Jamari, in Rondonia, where 90,000 (or nearly 40 per cent) of its 220,000 hectares will be managed. The definition of concessionaires is done through a public auction, which involves social and environmental criteria as well as an obligation to pay for the use of the forest resources. The Union will earn money from the use of its natural resources, which will be spent on monitoring, inspecting and regulating forestry and in supporting sustainable forest activities.

Through sustainable management, the forest generates its own conservation. It is the very opposite from deforestation, where the forest is totally cut down so that the land can be put to another use. Through sustainable management products are only taken from the forest when they will not endanger its biodiversity, structure and functionality. This fundamentally conservationist strategy allows many other products besides wood to be exploited, such as fruits, seeds, resins, oils, and services, etc. We need to offer the option of buying wood that is certified and labelled as green, a measure that will help fight illegal logging.

Climate change and the demand for new forest products make up the final two challenges. Climate change is a reality, and it is fundamentally important to know its dynamics if Brazil wants both to preserve its forests and to make a sustainable use of them. Brazilian research indicates that

increasing temperatures in the Amazon region — which are predicted to rise by two to three degrees by 2050 — and the resulting reduction in rainfall, could turn 30 to 60 per cent of the forest into savannah, affecting biodiversity, human health, and the availability of such natural resources as water.

One of the highlights of the new forest products is the prospect of getting energy from forest biomass. Second generation biofuels come from the forests, as well as from agriculture. The potential demand for them represents an amazing opportunity for Brazilian forests, justifying more investment and in-depth knowledge of their dynamics.

We do understand that — if we are to preserve not just the Amazon but other important Brazilian biomes, like the Atlantic Forest and Cerrado — we need to innovate and implement creative measures that are not limited to mere command and control. We need, first, to embody the chain of production in sustainable development initiatives and to promote measures that — allied to preservation efforts — give economic options for people, mainly small farmers and land owners, to encourage them to keep our forests standing. If we do this, we will meet a great challenge, for the sake both of environmentalists and of the preservation of the planet itself. ^{UNEP}