

## Can capitalism save the Amazon?

By Ben Anderson  
BBC Panorama, Brazil and Guyana

It would be easy to think that the rainforest was saved, or at least, that the destruction of the Amazon rainforest is no longer one of the great crises facing a planet finally reaching consensus on the issue of global warming.

Sting still does annual concerts, but by and large as a cause - one of the first I ever noticed as a child growing up in the 1980s - has largely disappeared from the public sphere.

After 30 minutes in a plane with Greenpeace, who have been monitoring deforestation in the Amazon for the last seven years, it was clear that while it may have disappeared as a cause, the loggers, cattle ranchers, and now the soya-farmers are as busy as they have ever been.

Underneath us a sand road, which will one day be paved, was already flanked on both sides by endless fields of crops, burnt-out forest and farmers so sure that they would not get arrested they had built houses, silos, warehouses and roads.

Much of this illegal land clearance was even taking place on what is supposed to be protected land.

It is clear that environmental campaigning, and Brazilian law itself, have both largely failed to protect the Amazon.

Deforestation had been going down for three years straight, but when commodity prices, particularly beef and soya, went up, all the mechanisms that had been lauded, were powerless.

Deforestation soon increased - according to some, by as much as 69%.

It is also clear that if we are serious about combating climate change, the debate about what to do is seriously skewed.

### **Farmer's alliance**

As I stood next to one huge forest fire, I thought of all the times I have been urged to unplug my phone charger, turn my TV off standby or turn the thermostat down by a couple of degrees.

Yet I cannot remember ever being told that the fires burning down the rainforest are responsible for 20% of worldwide carbon emissions, the same amount as all the transport in the world combined.

Thankfully I soon met a few men who were convinced that things could change.

In the state of Mato Grosso, the most deforested state in Brazil, I met American John Carter, a Gulf War veteran, who is married to a Brazilian.

He arrived in the Amazon over 10 years ago, thinking, like me, that after all the rhetoric, there had to be people on the ground making huge strides in conservation.

### **Bank backing**

John decided to go it alone, and set up the Land Alliance, which now includes 166 farms and controls over 1.6m hectares of land.

Not only are they committed to sustainable development, John has attracted voluntary money from the Dutch agricultural Rabobank, who pay him to keep enough of his forest standing to offset their carbon emissions.

I asked John how the money he gets from Rabobank compares to the money he gets from traditional crops.

"It's easily three times more than I could make than I could make with beef and it's twice what I could make with soya beans. So it's a huge number," he said.

That was encouraging enough, but across Brazil's northern border I saw two models that not only place monetary value on standing forests, but do it without relying on payments from carbon emitters.

The Kyoto protocol rewards those who chop down trees but then replant, but makes no provision for those who do not chop down their trees in the first place.

### **Essential services**

Hylton Murray-Philipson is the managing director of Canopy Capitol, whose idea is simple enough.

"If you had bought the rights to car-parking in 1950, and agreed to pay Hammersmith council £1 per slot, for 100 years," he explained, "for the first 10 years of that investment, everybody would be laughing at you, they'd think you were completely crazy.

"Think of it now - something that was inconceivable then, is now commonplace - we all pay £100 a slot or whatever it is. So if you had those rights, you would now be sitting pretty."

Hylton sees the essential services that the rainforests provide in the same way. He has secured the rights to 370,000 hectares of Guyana's rainforest, and needed to attract 10 investors to get his project going.

He got them with just 12 calls. "Nobody has called me mad for placing such a value on the services of the rainforest," he said. In fact the World Bank have invited him to speak at their annual meeting.

And if I needed proof that the basic premise of Hylton's idea could be rolled out across an entire country, I soon got it.

### **Need for change**

President Bharrat Jagdeo of Guyana has actually offered stewardship of his country's entire rainforest to the UK, in exchange not for investment, but development aid and assistance.

Despite his rainforest being the size of England, and despite his offer being on the table for over two years, Mr Jagdeo has, incredibly, had no response to his offer.

But it was at least possible to see that the forces that had been responsible for the destruction of the rainforest, could be deployed to save it.

It will take a great deal of work and international resolve to apply the idea to a country the size of Brazil, but many of the people I met on my journey told me one thing that convinced me that things could change. It is absurd that while beef, soya and timber reach record prices, the essential services that the rainforests provide are worth nothing.

Enough people from all sides of the debate seem to be realising this, and that is what leaves me believing that the rainforest can, as it must, be saved.

**Panorama: Can Money Grow on Trees? BBC One at 2030 BST on Monday 8 September.**

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