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# VOICES FOR JUST CLIMATE ACTION BRAZIL

Factsheet

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# VCA CONTEXT, IMPLEMENTATION AND GOALS

4 of the 6 VCA alliance members are present in **Brazil**. WWF, Hivos, SSN and Fundación Avina work together with their local partners to strengthen environmental defenders' organisations and activist coalitions in the **Amazon** to protect their territories and cultures.



## THE AMAZON

The Amazon covers a huge area (6.7 million sq km) of South America. Nearly 60% of the rainforest is in Brazil, while the rest is shared among eight other countries—Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela, and French Guiana.

The Amazon biome is close to its tipping point when the forest is unable anymore to keep its structure and functionality. Indigenous people and traditional communities play a crucial role on protecting the forest and reducing deforestation on their territories, the main cause of GHG emissions and loss of biodiversity in Brazil.

The indigenous territories in Brazil are under increasing pressure in the last few years, the political, environmental, economic, and COVID-19 crises under Jair Bolsonaro's government have created a continuous flow of social and environmental setbacks that have increased deforestation and conversion in the Amazon. The destruction of nature and the systems it protects is followed by increasing threats and violence against indigenous and traditional peoples in Brazil.

The dismantling of environmental and social protection systems in the last two years resulted in the loss of civic space participation in policymaking in general, particularly for climate actions, shutting down spaces of dialogue with civil society and cutting up to 95% of the budget allocated to combat climate change. There has been a drastic decrease in civil society participation in environmental councils, which are formal institutional forums. As a result of these budget cuts, institutional degradation and militarization of environmental protection, any enforcement against destructive or illegal activities is substantially reduced.

This too has led to an increase in violence and threats against traditional and Indigenous communities standing up for their rights and fighting for the protection of their territories.

Currently, the Brazilian government is pushing to institutionalise a set of bills that is referred to as 'The Destruction Package.' One of these bills is the 'Anything goes on Indigenous Lands' bill (191/2020). This bill will remove the veto power of Indigenous and traditional communities over decisions that impact their lands as it lifts the prerequisite of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

## POPULATION

Brazil is the world's fifth largest country by area and the seventh most populous. It has a population of 215 million people. Of which approximately 897,000 have identified themselves as indigenous persons, originating from 305 diverse ethnic groups. Indigenous territories occupy 13% of Brazil, have more than 90% of its natural environments preserved, and are a central part of any strategy to combat climate change and conserve biodiversity in Brazil and worldwide.

According to the Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA), about 9% (2.7 million) of the Amazon's population is still made up of indigenous people – 350 different ethnic groups, more than 60 of which still remain largely isolated. In the Brazil alone, there are 900,000 indigenous people living in the Amazon.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

The Amazon is crucial for the biodiversity and the indigenous people that call this rainforest their home, but it is also the rainmaker for a large part of South America and keeping its carbon stored is crucial to keep global change at bay. The landscape contains:

- **one in 10 known species on Earth**
- **1.4 billion acres of dense forests, half of the planet's remaining tropical forests**
- **the 3,977-mile-long Amazon River, the second-longest river on Earth after the Nile**
- **2.3 million square miles in the Amazon basin, about 40% of South America**

There is a clear link between the health of the Amazon and the health of the planet. The Amazon is of vital importance because people around the world, as well as locally, depend on the rainforest. Not just for food, water, wood and medicines, but also to help stabilise the climate—around 76 billion tonnes of carbon is stored in the Amazon rainforest. The trees in the Amazon also release 20 billion tonnes of water into the atmosphere per day, playing a critical role in global and regional carbon and water cycles. Deforestation releases significant amounts of this carbon, which is having negative consequences around the world.

The issue of deforestation in the Amazon is broad, continuous, and deeply linked to economic factors with livestock, agriculture, mining, infrastructure expansion, logging and land grabbing being key drivers of deforestation. Deforestation in the Amazon in April 2021 is the largest in the historical series, as shown by INPE's National Institute for Space Research monitoring results. This is made worse by the impunity (lowest value of fines in 20 years) enjoyed by those most responsible for the record increase in deforestation and fires on private lands (i.e., rural producers) and protected public areas (i.e., land grabbers

and gold miners). Indigenous territories are also home to invaluable cultural wealth, with distinct peoples, cultures, languages, and world views. Historically, Indigenous territories have played a very important role in curbing deforestation. According to data from the Instituto Socio-Ambiental (ISA), despite accounting for 24% of the territory of the Legal Amazon, indigenous territories have only 7% of accumulated deforestation in the entire region. Yet, the discourse and actions of the Brazilian federal government reinforce the permissiveness of illegal invasions for clandestine activities and put indigenous and traditional communities at risk. Some examples are Bill 490 (which authorizes a series of impactful activities on Indigenous Lands, including mining, road construction, hydroelectric plants, etc.), and Bill 2633 (which encourages and legalizes the illegal occupation of public lands, also boosting mass deforestation).

## CLIMATE CRISIS

The massive deforestation of the Amazon rainforest is a fundamental driver of climate change, not only because of direct greenhouse gas emissions but also from changes in regional weather patterns and the reduced ability for climate adaptation. Climate change impacts in the Amazon have increased in the last 20 years, with rising temperatures, the extension of droughts and changes at rainfall patterns reducing smallholders' productivity and their earning. The increase in the global average temperature, with increasingly frequent and extreme weather events, such as severe droughts, floods, and heat waves leading to a soaring climate crisis scenario, necessitate the need for local climate solutions to support climate mitigation and adaptation.

The impact of climate change will be uneven and threatens to drive another 100 million people into poverty by 2030, raising the importance of discussing climate justice. In most cases, these people are on the margins of decision-making spaces and climate action processes.

On the other hand, these same populations are creating their own local ways of dealing with these impacts.

## SCOPE OF THE VCA PROGRAM

The work of WWF-Brazil under the VCA program is largely focused on strengthening environmental defenders' organisations and activist coalitions in protecting their territories and cultures.

In particular, VCA has identified the need to directly support youth and women activists, as they face many difficulties embedded within root causes of social, economic, and environmental injustices. During COP 26, Txai Suruí was one of the indigenous people's youth leaders that raised their voices for climate justice with VCA's support.

Furthermore, criminalisation of activists and delegitimization of press is being a strategy to demobilise civil society organisations. Activists and journalists are experiencing attacks, ranging from reputational threats, censorship to death threats and killings, limiting the freedom of expression in Brazil. Activists from indigenous and other minority groups are in a position of heightened risk.

VCA Brazil is nurturing a collaborative vision marked by the respect for local contexts, knowledge, and cultures in all interaction levels with local partners. Furthermore, VCA Brazil is focusing on strengthening agendas that partners have historically been carrying out in their territories, adding, and enhancing tools information and connections designed to foster the very permanence and survival of local communities.

## BRAZIL IN 2026: WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE THROUGH THE VCA PROGRAMME

Through VCA, it is envisioned that the Amazon local voices will play their protagonist role driving effective climate solutions, catalyzing a socioeconomic development model that strengthens biodiversity for the wellbeing of Amazon people. There will be a strong climate justice network that strengthens and reflects the diverse actors and agendas within and beyond the Amazonian territories. The hope is that VCA alliance members and their local partners will be seen as polinizers and inspire more partners to join the movement.