

RAPID ASSESSMENT OF THE BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES OF THE AMAZON BASIN/REGION

Bonn – Germany, August 27th – September 2nd 2023

The Amazon

- The Amazon Region covers an area of 7,918,682.31 Km², while the Amazon River basin, strictly speaking, covers 6,118,000 Km².
- The Amazon Basin/Region, comprising 44% of the surface of South America, is home to the largest contiguous tropical rainforest in the world, providing approximately 20% of the total freshwater discharge on the planet, and around 70% of the freshwater on South America.
- Several Amazonian countries are considered megadiverse and multicultural because they are home to a large number of species and the traditional knowledge related to them.
- There are approximately 50 million people living in the Amazon Region, between 420 and 511 indigenous peoples groups of which approximately 66 are in voluntary isolation or initial contact, in addition to other ethnic communities, *quilombolas*, riparian, afro-descendants, peasants and settlers.
- The Amazon is under increasing and constant threats and drivers of change, mainly related to changes in land use, deforestation and climate change, where some areas of the Amazon have already reached the tipping point.

The Rapid Assessment and ACTO

- The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) is an intergovernmental organization, constituted by the eight Amazonian countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela), which signed in 1978 an Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) to promote the harmonious development of the Amazonian territories in such a way that the joint actions of the Amazonian countries produce equitable and mutually beneficial results in achieving the sustainable development of the Amazon Region.
- ACTO is the official mechanism for cooperation and convergence and political dialogue at the level of the Amazon Region.
- The Rapid Assessment is part of the "Biological Diversity Program for the Amazon Basin/Region" of the ACTO, which was negotiated and approved unanimously in 2021 by the eight Amazonian Countries.
- The Rapid Assessment is an strategic tool that provides relevant, timely and rigorous information for decision making; strengthening the science, policy and society interface, with the objective of directing adequate sustainable development processes in the Region, and contributing to the implementation of effective public policies, based on findings, scientific and technical data for decision / policy makers and other social actors related to the sustainable management of biodiversity.
- The Rapid Assessment is the first subregional assessment of the Amazon Region that follows the conceptual framework and methodology of the IPBES.

The Elaboration of the Rapid Assessment

- Elaborated by 118 experts (53 men & 65 women) from the Amazonian countries, which also maintain a geographical and multidisciplinary balance. They are independent authors and work *ad-honorem*.
- The Authors worked for approximately 540 days to elaborate the Rapid Assessment and for around 87,766 hours of voluntary work. This process lasted more than 2 and half years.
- The Rapid Assessment had articulation with other processes like the IPBES Regional Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for the Americas; the National Assessment on Biodiversity of Colombia; The Initiative of Brazil; and with the Science Panel for the Amazon. Recommendation were received such as the filling of information gaps generated by them; include study cases (the Rapid Assessment has approximately 80 of them); identify new information gaps; and collect testimonies from Amazonian inhabitants with their perceptions about the biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Region, as well as, their recommendations and messages to decision-makers, in order to conserve and sustainable use the natural resources. These testimonies are an innovative complementary product of the Rapid Assessment called "Voices of the Amazon".
- An in-person meeting was carried out in April 2022 with representatives of IPLCs of the Amazon Region where a vast quantity of information was collected not only purely related to biodiversity and ecosystem services but also taking into consideration some related thematic like climate change, gender equity, among others.
- Different webinars were implemented with the academic and investigation sectors, as well as the private business sector.
- The Rapid Assessment was presented in the COP19 of CITES, in the COP15 of the CBD, in the Pre-Summit in Leticia, Colombia, as well as during the IV Summit of the Amazon Countries in Belém, Brazil.

Main Findings and Key Messages

The Importance of the Amazon's Biological and Cultural Diversity

- The potential benefits of Amazon's contributions to the planet are at risk due to some human activities. Anthropogenic processes such as deforestation, land use change, pollution, invasive species, and overexploitation of natural resources negatively impact the resilience of the Amazon, ecosystem services, and IPLCs. In this regard, there is growing concern about inadequate land-use planning and the need for greater attention and integration among stakeholders to ensure the sustainable management of Amazonian resources.
- The "Blue Amazon", an ecological connectivity approach from the Andes to the Atlantic Ocean, where the Amazon biome meets the Atlantic Ocean, with an economic and regional importance, requiring an integrated planning. This dynamic regional interaction between river discharge and tidal cycles shapes ecosystems, fisheries, and mangrove services. Its significance to populations and environmental interests demands heightened attention, collaborative management, and shared responsibility for conservation and sustainability.

Visions of Development and Land-Use Planning for the Amazon Basin/Region

- Urgent paradigm shift is required for Amazon's sustainable development. The current extractivist model overlooks IPLCs perspectives, nature-culture interdependence, and non-monetary economies. Achieving SDGs demands transformative changes embracing social, environmental, and economic pillars equally, fostering biocultural diversity and nature's rights, and redefining economic development for resilience and equality.
- Articulating policies, global economic instruments, and regional strategies is vital for the Amazon's sustainability. Biocultural approaches emphasize inclusivity, transboundary cooperation, and recognition of nature rights and their relationship to human rights.

Threats and Drivers of Change

- The unsustainable development model, focusing in extractivist activities, has led the Amazon to an unprecedented increase in the loss of its forests, biodiversity, and ecosystem services. If those current trajectories continue, Nature's Contributions to People (NCP), which depend directly on the quality of ecosystem services, may not be secured in the medium term. Such trajectories affect and cause unpredictable losses for IPLCs, society in general, and the world. Above all, they put their resilience to future changes at stake.
- Extractive economic growth harms the Amazon by reducing its resources and affecting the integrity of the basin. The irreversible change stems from natural resource extraction, hydropower, agribusiness, population growth, road connectivity, and urban expansion. Without sustainable change, these factors will continue to have negative impacts on the region's ecology and on the interactions between society and nature.
- The irrational and increasing use of mercury in the Region, mainly related to illegal mining activities, is leading to a pollution problem with high impacts on the environment and public health. Urgent traceability and control measures are required, from the perspective of common and differential responsibilities throughout the chain of products obtained from mining, especially in the supply chain of gold.

The Amazon and Climate Change

- The impact of climate change on the resilience of the Amazon, added to deforestation and fires, threatens its vital services and planetary climate stability. Prioritizing mitigation and adaptation in Amazon policy is essential.
- Strategies to combat the climate threat in the Amazon must involve sectors and companies aligned with Social, Environmental and Corporate Governance Criteria (ESG) and international cooperation, aligned with global objectives such as the SDGs and the commitments of the UNFCCC. Economic, environmental and social losses require innovative mitigation and adaptation measures.

Knowledge Systems for Decision-Making

- Recognizing and protecting IPLCs knowledge is pivotal for innovative Amazon conservation strategies. Land access and autonomy are crucial, enabling the transmission of practices that maintain cultures. Incorporating IPLCs perspectives in academia and policy-making enriches science, enhancing sustainable solutions and ensuring dynamic adaptation for the Region's challenges.
- The Amazon's biocultural heritage depends on understanding biodiversity from the viewpoints of IPLCs and tribal groups. The mutual dependence between these groups and their environment underscores the intrinsic value of biodiversity. Strengthening intergenerational and intercultural dialogues is urgent to rescue and preserve traditional knowledge, promoting a holistic approach to conservation and respect for IPLCs cultures.

Political Institutions and Participation in Governance

- Strengthening regional transboundary cooperation through mechanisms like ACTO facilitates effective governance and coordinated conservation actions, guided by international frameworks. Prioritizing multi-level governance schemes ensures harmonious relations between communities and governments, aligning common and differential efforts and responsibilities towards shared objectives for sustainable management.
- Inadequate research investment hinders comprehensive knowledge of the biome and its biocultural dynamics. Bridging information gaps through intercultural dialogue, education, and social policies is crucial for effective local governance and autonomy. Prioritizing education, science, technology, and innovation, including private sector collaboration, is essential for the sustainable development in the Amazon Region.