



BSR Conference 2008 | Sustainability: Leadership Required Brazilian Amazon: Breaking Myths

Breakout Session Summary

Wednesday, November 5, 2008 | 2-3:30 p.m.

Speakers

- **Fabio Abdala**, Sustainability Consultant, Alcoa
- **João Paulo Ribeiro Capobianco**, Visiting Scholar, Columbia University
- **Cibele de Macedo Salviatto**, Partner, Atitude
- **Alejandra Martín**, Manager of Energy & Extractives Practice, Business for Social Responsibility (moderator)

Highlights

- Sustainable projects in culturally or geographically distinct regions should include actions in governance, monitoring, and funding support.
- Nearly 20 percent of the Amazon has been deforested to date, and that trend has been increasing annually since 1991.
- Deforestation issues within inhabited forests cannot be solved by creating “hands-off” nature reserves. We must look at implementing sustainable production practices.

Memorable Quotes

- “In its ‘State of the World’s Forests,’ the Food and Agriculture Organization indicates that seven countries alone (Brazil, Indonesia, Sudan, Zambia, Mexico, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Myanmar) lost more than 710,000 square kilometers of forests from 1990 to 2000.” —João Paulo Ribeiro Capobianco, Columbia University
- “If you think you are sustainable, you are not. Soy is a significant contributor to deforestation in the Amazon. And the number-one cause of deforestation today is cattle.” —Cibele de Macedo Salviatto, Atitude

Overview

Abdala began the session by introducing a case study of Alcoa’s sustainable Juruti bauxite mine in the Amazon rainforest. At this mine, the difficulty is in implementing a sustainable mining structure within a remote, mostly rural area with a largely poor population and a lack of basic public services.





Business for Social Responsibility

To address this challenge, Alcoa convened a group of business, academic, civil society, and government agencies to create a strategy based on the UN's Agenda 21, an action plan for instances in which humans impact the environment. The project resulted in several actions: First, they created a local, multi-stakeholder sustainable development council—with representatives from the private and public sectors and civil society—to discuss a common vision for the future, along with short and long-term actions to get them there. Then they introduced a system of indicators to monitor the development of Juruti and its surroundings and provide feedback to the council. The project also created a local and regional development fund to raise resources to respond to Juruti's challenges and the council's priorities.

Ribeiro Capobianco continued the discussion by emphasizing the complex relationship between deforestation and climate change. While fossil fuels have been the major source of global greenhouse gases, tropical deforestation is increasingly becoming an important source, already accounting for between 10 and 20 percent of annual global emissions. Not only does deforestation threaten climate and biodiversity, it also impacts people and therefore requires urgent action. The experience in Brazil shows that appropriate government policies and interventions could have a significant impact on this effort.

De Macedo Salviatto turned the conversation to focus on how we have gotten to the point where we, as humans, have permitted such large-scale deforestation. She posits that modern culture and companies have moved from a holistic view to a focus on separation into components—with competition between departments seen as creating better results. If we begin to look at ourselves as integral contributors to bigger systems, sustainability should improve. This underscores the importance of creating relationships of mutual trust when working with other cultures, which can take time. Companies can be intimidated by community consultations, but they have to understand that the cost of operating in an area where they are unwanted is much greater than the smaller cost of investing the time to build relationships in places where they want to operate.

Ribeiro Capobianco closed the session by emphasizing that this topic is more about changing the production system than stopping deforestation. The problem is not a lack of understanding about the importance of the rainforests, but a lack of resources to use the environment in a sustainable way. And the problem is not just within the Amazon. In Brazil alone, there are many areas with similar problems, such as the savannah and the coastal mountain ranges.

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