

USAID's Environment Vision for the Amazon Region

Vision: USAID envisions a healthy and resilient Amazon Region that is valued by society, ensures human well-being, and safeguards our global climate

Purpose: Conserve biodiversity and the benefits provided to all people by ecosystems in the Amazon Region

High-Level Goals in the Amazon Region:

1. Decrease deforestation, forest degradation, and greenhouse gas emissions
2. Foster an environmentally friendly economy.
3. Protect key landscapes and species.
4. Secure rights, resources and health of forest-dependent communities.

Problem Statement:

The Amazon Region is a unique asset to its nations and is valued by the world. The region is home to 33 million people, including 1.6 million indigenous people. It hosts one third of the world's known species of plants and animals – many of which do not occur anywhere else on earth. The Amazon Region is the largest river system in the world representing approximately 15% of the freshwater draining into the oceans worldwide. The natural capital of the Amazon, including biodiversity, water resources, and stocks of carbon in standing forests, is of global importance and has great potential to further contribute to national and regional economic development goals.

In recent years, South America has undergone rapid economic growth and significant political and social change. Large parts of the Amazon Region, however, continue to experience high poverty and essentially remain beyond the authority of the state. As pressures to develop the region's rich natural resources intensify, so do the over-exploitation, contamination, and degradation of those resources. Amazonian countries all face significant environmental problems, including widespread deforestation, due to uncontrolled expansion of agricultural frontiers, large-scale infrastructure investments, mining (large and small scale) and petroleum extraction, and unsustainable (legal and illegal) logging. Environmental challenges will only be magnified by the widespread and severe impacts of climate change, including potential declines in forest health. Unfortunately, ineffective governance, including weak, decentralized systems, widespread corruption, conflict, and a lack of political understanding or will, undermines the potential to sustainably develop the region's rich natural capital and respond to these threats.

Purpose of the Vision and Roles for Implementation:

All USAID environment programs operating in the Amazon Region will align to our vision and new investments will be guided by the high level goals. This will allow for results to be consolidated and reported and greater synergies to be promoted. Bilateral operating units will be the primary entities to implement country-specific actions that contribute to the overall vision and goals. The South America Regional operating unit will represent and promote the vision and its goals and results, play a convening role in the region and implement targeted activities to address gaps or respond to critical needs which cannot be effectively executed bilaterally. USAID/DC operating units will provide technical support and services to the region and recommend resource allocations in support of the Amazon vision and goals.

Our Approach:

As the Amazon's 3rd largest conservation donor, and with its long history in the region, USAID can provide thought leadership and a convening role in support of Amazonian countries' stewardship of their natural resources. Beyond that, there is no "one size fits all" solution to addressing the challenges in the Amazon so individual USAID operating units may use different strategic approaches to achieve the Agency's high level goals. Some of the most effective approaches employed by USAID's environment programs include:

- Lowering greenhouse gas emissions, conserving biodiversity, and achieving economic development goals by promoting sustainable natural forest management, including the creation and improved management of protected areas and indigenous territories.
- Incorporating the value of goods and services relating to the natural environment and low emissions approaches into development planning.
- Ensuring that environment programs respond to the needs of local and indigenous communities.
- Strengthening governance systems to support conservation and sustainable development.
- Strengthening capacity in the Amazon to generate the scientific evidence base needed to understand and address environmental challenges now and in the future.