



Scientists show that deforestation of the Amazon leads to serious crop losses and economic losses. A handful of companies' profit-seeking keeps the life-threatening industry going.

Deforestation makes the world poorer

CLIMATE

Gustav Gillund, 26 Apr.





FLAMES for profit: An aerial photo shows a fire in the Amazon in Brazil in 2022. Experts say the fires are started by ranchers and land speculators, who set wildfires to clear the area of trees. Photo: Douglas Magno, AFP/NTB

Large parts of agriculture in South America are characterized by increased drought, with serious consequences for the world's food security. New research links a shift in the start of the rainy season by up to 76 days directly to deforestation in the Amazon.

RAINFORESTS OF THE WORLD

The result is a drastic decline in crops in one of the world's most important food baskets.

While the economic losses are great, the destruction also contributes to what the UN refers to as a possible collapse in global food security: It is estimated that 122 million more people have been dragged into starvation since 2019 alone.

- We all lose, says Britaldo Sivera Soares-Filho, who has led the research team.

He warns that we are beginning to approach a point where the development becomes impossible to reverse.

Flying Rivers –

The rainforest acts as a giant pump. It recycles water particles that are transported across Brazil through flying rivers, explains Soares-Filho.

He is a world-leading researcher on deforestation of the Amazon, from the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Brazil. The class match meets him at Regnskogfondet in Oslo.

The "flying rivers" he refers to are air currents that carry large amounts of water vapor over thousands of kilometers. These airborne rivers influence regional and global weather patterns, including precipitation.

The trees in the Amazon rainforest release around 20 billion tonnes of water into the atmosphere every day.

- When you remove areas of the rainforest and turn them into agricultural areas, the forest loses this function, he explains.

A vicious circle

The consequences for agriculture are great. Deforestation causes rainfall to decrease, and yields in the converted agricultural areas drop drastically.

The companies that cultivate the land react by expanding the agricultural areas, i.e. by cutting down even more forest to keep production levels up.

- They are shooting themselves in the foot, says Soares-Filho, who refers to it as a vicious circle that threatens the very basis of life in the region's agriculture.

The long dry periods affect the entire region. Since most of Brazil's agriculture is dependent on rainfall, this has major consequences for food production.

Brazil is the world's fourth largest food producer and covers, among other things, half of the world's need for soybeans. When the rainforest loses its function as a rainfall regulator, it leads to increased food prices.

It's bad news in a world where rising global food prices are already pushing tens of millions of people into hunger every year, according to figures from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

Not slowing

down **In the past year, several countries have succeeded in reducing the pace of deforestation. After Lula da Silva was elected president in 2023, Brazil has halved the rate of deforestation in the part of the Amazon that is in Brazil. Colombia has also been very successful in regulating deforestation in the last two years.**

The pace of global deforestation last year slowed for the first time in many years.

- But the decline we saw in 2023 was almost exclusively due to low numbers in Brazil and Colombia. In almost all other countries, deforestation has increased in pace, says Soares-Filho.

The increase in other countries means that Brazil and Colombia's efforts are almost set to zero.

- Are you optimistic?

- I have no choice. I simply cannot be pessimistic. Then I think I would have shot myself, says the researcher resignedly.

"Finally, it is not just the Amazon that is collapsing. Climate change is global."

— DR. BRITALDO SILVEIRA SOARES-FILHO

The rainforest economy

Approximately 80 percent of the trees that are felled each year in the tropics are cleared to make room to grow cocoa, soybeans, palm oil and breed cattle.

These raw materials are used to produce chocolate, leather seats, animal feed and thousands of other products.

Most of the value created through deforestation goes to large multinational companies, which take the added value from the raw materials. Very little of the value creation remains in Brazil or other countries with rainforests.

The research Soares-Filho leads shows how Brazil itself actually risks losing if companies continue with deforestation. It estimates that this year alone, increased drought in the region has led to a loss of over seven billion US dollars in agricultural income.

In recent years, the World Bank has also become aware of the destructive economic activity. In a report, they estimate that the loss of value caused by the Amazon being deforested is 317 billion dollars a year. That is seven times higher than the profit from all raw material extraction in the Amazon.

Deforestation therefore not only has major economic and social consequences for Brazil, but leads to the world becoming poorer.

- *Why do we continue then?*

- It's a question you almost have to ask a sociologist or philosopher. It's madness, Soares-Filho replies.

- But we will all feel the consequences. Finally, it is not just the Amazon that is collapsing. The climate effects are global.

Effective management

Soares-Filho points out that Brazil is a large country, and it is difficult for the state to manage effectively. It is also required that local politicians cooperate, which they often do not do.

At the same time, he clarifies that deforestation is part of a global industry that is kept alive by large international companies. These do not have to think about the social, climatic and economic damage that the industry inflicts on the region and the world.

The responsibility cannot therefore only lie with the authorities in the states that sit on rainforests.

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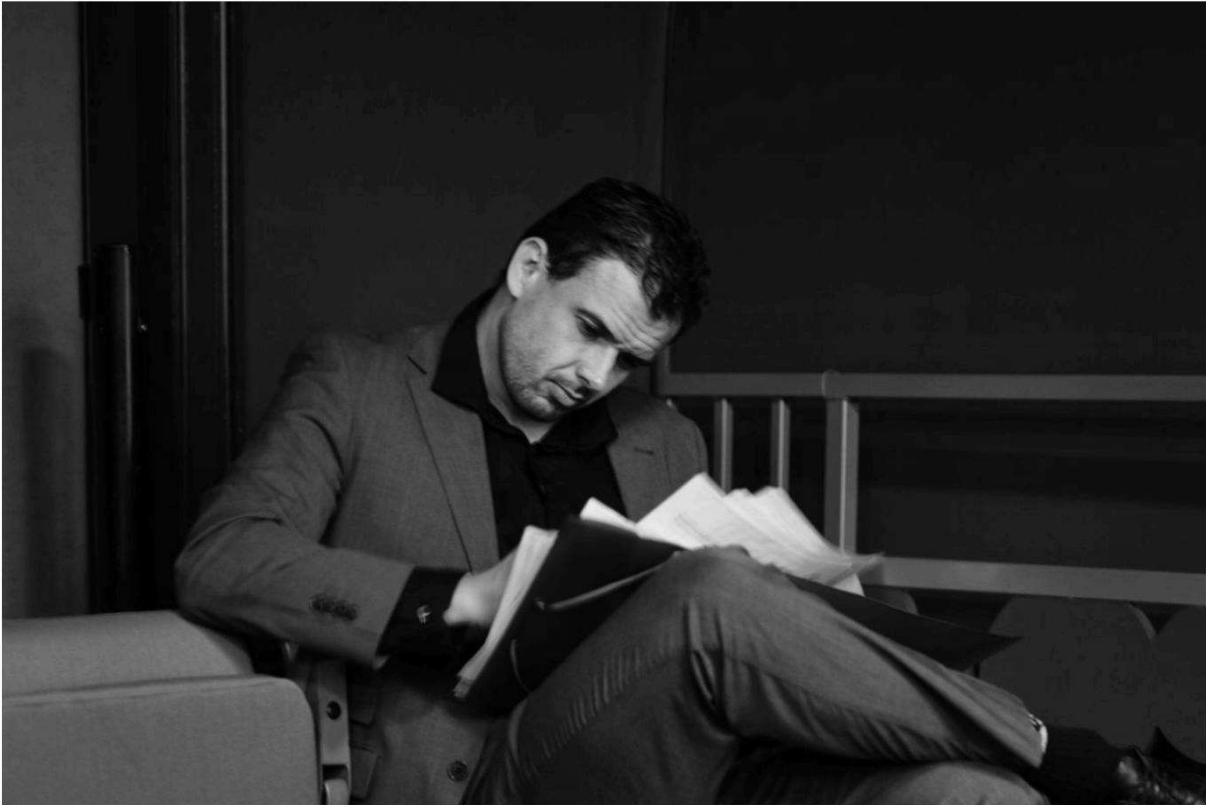




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