

Brazilian Government

Development Projects by the Brazilian Government

Traditional agricultural methods support few people and, overall, offer low levels of production. The Brazilian government has therefore encouraged the development of the region, both for industry and settlement, as a means of encouraging people to leave overpopulated and poorer parts of Brazil, such as the north-east. The government's policies reflect their *economic* and *social* perspectives.

Farming along the Trans-Amazonian Highway

The Government of Brazil began building a major road network in the Amazon Basin in the 1960s. They saw this as a way of utilising the resources of the Amazon and promoting the resettlement of people from crowded cities and from the drought-stricken northeast.

The *Trans-Amazonian Highway*, which runs over 5 500 km from Recife on the coast to the border of Peru, was completed in 1975. Built by the Brazilian Government with the assistance of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the Trans-Amazonian Highway cost over US\$450 million to construct. The road was cut through the forest and, while sealed in places, it is largely either gravel or uncovered soil. It has been important in opening the Amazon region for more modern types of farming.



The Trans-Amazonian Highway.

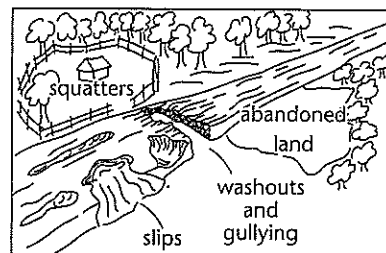
Land on each side of the Trans-Amazonian Highway was reserved for government-organised settlements. Landless families, mostly from north-east Brazil, were each given plots of land to clear and farm. The government also helped to build homes and provide credit to these 'pioneers' for the purchase of food, equipment and seeds.

The development of Amazonia has led to a population increase from 2 million (1960) to 30 million (2000). However, the majority of the 3 000 000 new settlers who have settled in the Amazon since 1970 are not supported by the government. Most are landless peasants who have been attracted by the prospect of free land, and have just taken land near the highway, felling and burning trees to create farmland for themselves.

The government has encouraged and supported the clearing of large areas of land for pasture, eg cattle ranching, to produce meat for overseas consumption (largely as hamburgers and frankfurters). However, removal of the forest cover and topsoil has rapidly increased leaching. Soil erosion is also a problem for the farms.

The Trans-Amazonian Highway is now largely in disrepair, with many roads not sealed.

- Exposed soils have simply washed away.
- Indigenous people in the 'way of progress' have been relocated.
- There has been collapse of roads due to washouts, gulying and slips.
- Many ranches and farms failed due to poor soils – the fertility was depleted rapidly after trees were removed.
- Poor education and lack of land use knowledge, along with poor animal husbandry, combined to force many off the land.
- 'Squatters' settling on road margins farmed the land but abandoned it when the soil was exhausted.
- Land has often been left bare and without the necessary soil structure to allow regeneration.



Brazilian Government	<p>Interests here are <i>political</i>. The government is aware of the opposition to deforestation by other countries. While anxious to retain a good image, it is also hampered by huge debts and few available resources.</p>	<p>Laws have been passed to try to limit deforestation, such as one in 1996 that allows landowners to cut down only 20% of the forest on their property. Logging of mahogany trees has been made illegal. However, due to a lack of resources, such laws are not able to be enforced, and little has been done to protect the rainforest. Only 4% of it is in protected reserves.</p>
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