

Razing the rainforest

Fact Sheet

Lesson1: Razing the rainforest – sources of deforestation

Since 1970 an estimated 230 000 square miles of Amazon rainforest has been destroyed and while deforestation rates dipped four years ago, they are once again on the rise.

In Brazil there seems to be a correlation between deforestation and economic development, with high rates of forest removal associated with times of slow economic growth. However there are a number of sources of deforestation (not solely attributed to Brazil) that have an impact on rainforests across the globe.

Subsistence farming – land clearing for small scale agricultural use. However, while some agree that this is leading to increased deforestation, the scale of the impact is usually small.

Commercial logging – in theory it is licensed and controlled but in practice, areas of land are cleared illegally. Large areas of land are cleared especially at times of economic boom and where a country has an export driven economy.

Commercial agriculture – deforestation to provide large areas of land to grow crops on a commercial scale. Soybeans are now grown on cleared land in the Amazon rainforest.

Cattle ranching – accounted for 38% of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest between 1966 and 1975 and today it is estimated that the situation could be even worse as Brazil's economy becomes more export driven.

Infrastructure development – land cleared for building of roads and communications that lead in and out of the forest. Roads provide access to logging, agricultural and cattle ranching areas. Roads open-up forest land to exploitation by poor landless farmers. The Trans-Amazonian Highway has been linked to rising deforestation rates as well as causing a number of environmental problems.

These sources of deforestation are in evidence across the globe and students, throughout the lesson, should be aware of this. If students have internet access they should be encouraged to investigate how the source they are looking at affects rainforests in different parts of the world.

Before students start tackling the issue of managing rainforests **it is essential that they understand the sources of deforestation and why deforestation is occurring.**

More details can be found on the **Challenge overview sheet.**