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A Corollary to “COP 30: Brazilian policies must change” Editorial

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Fearnside and Leal Filho’s editorial rightly underscores the urgency of addressing deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate change in Brazil. Hosting COP 30 in Belém has drawn global attention to a country of vast ecological complexity—from rainforests to savannas, wetlands, and plains—which, as Tom Jobim famously noted, “is not for beginners.” However, while the editorial emphasises Brazil’s environmental shortcomings, its analysis risks oversimplification by attributing high-emission policies solely to all government branches outside the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MMA).

A complex interplay of competing agendas marks Brazilian governance. For example, while environmental agencies such as IBAMA and ICMBio, in coordination with bodies like the Federal Police, rigorously enforce environmental legislation, other ministries—including Transportation, Agriculture, Mines and Energy, and notably the Ministry of Finance through its leadership of the Ecological Transformation Plan—advance development strategies that sometimes conflict with environmental objectives. The Ecological Transformation Plan aims to foster sustainable economic growth by integrating technological advancement, environmental sustainability, and fair income distribution. Its existence clearly illustrates that environmental policy in Brazil is not the exclusive remit of the MMA, but part of a broader national agenda contending with real developmental imperatives.

Infrastructural debates further illustrate this dichotomy. The case of BR-319 shows that repeated attempts to repave the highway have met with strong resistance from environmental agencies and civil society, all underpinned by robust legal frameworks. Similarly, the controversy over oil drilling along the Equatorial Margin reflects a tug-of-war between economic development and environmental safeguards, as IBAMA has both denied permits and issued cautious technical recommendations.

Recent studies lend additional nuance. The article “Burying water and biodiversity through road constructions in Brazil” demonstrates that infrastructure projects can severely impact hydrological regimes and ecological integrity, challenging simplistic assertions that such projects serve only economic progress. Likewise, Gonçalves-Souza et al.’s “Species turnover does not rescue biodiversity in fragmented landscapes” shows that increased beta diversity in fragmented habitats does not compensate for local and landscape-scale biodiversity losses. These findings emphasise that rigorous, interdisciplinary scientific evaluation is essential to understanding the actual costs of development.

Moreover, the global failure to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (CBD Secretariat, 2020) exemplifies the systemic challenges even wealthier nations face in implementing effective conservation measures. This context further undermines simplistic critiques that single out Brazil as uniquely deficient.

Ultimately, while Brazil’s internal contradictions warrant rigorous scrutiny, the inadequacy of environmental action is not uniquely Brazilian. Wealthier nations have similarly fallen short of meeting biodiversity and climate targets despite their greater capacities. If the international community expects Brazil to play a central role in averting planetary tipping points, it must also support Brazil’s sustainable development through integrative policies and substantial financing mechanisms. Constructive, context-aware strategies—grounded in rigorous scientific evidence—are essential for reconciling economic growth with the conservation of Brazil’s invaluable natural heritage

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