PRACTICAL NOTE

Leveraging Brazil's leadership on climate and environmental action for human security

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Context

Brazil and the wider Latin America and Caribbean region (LAC) face significant challenges at the intersection of Climate, Peace, and Security (CPS). Brazil experiences extreme weather events such as major floods and droughts, which lead to displacement and loss of livelihoods. Deforestation and fires further contribute to global climate change as well as threaten the livelihoods of traditional communities through the violent escalation of land disputes.

Brazil also suffers from high criminality rates and several organised crime gangs. These illegal groups have, in recent years, increased their activities in biodiversity hotspots such as the Amazon region, engaging in activities such as illegal mining and logging, threatening ecosystems, and increasing the fragility of already vulnerable groups.

For decades, Brazil has played an important role in the discussions around climate change in international fora. It was in this South American nation that, in 1992, during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the three Rio Conventions were established: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Brazil has historically played an active role during COP negotiations and is set to host UNFCCC's COP30 in the Amazonian city of Belém.

Against this backdrop, and to develop locally driven solutions, a regional edition of the Berlin Climate and Security Conference (BCSC) was organised in Rio de Janeiro in June 2025, on the sidelines of the XXII Forte International Security Conference. BCSC-Rio built upon the outcomes of BCSC-Cali in 2024 by bringing together local and international stakeholders in the climate and security spheres to discuss the unique CPS challenges present in the Brazilian context, but also in the wider LAC region. Additionally, opportunities for collaboration and partnerships between Brazil, LAC, and Europe were explored, with the aim of leveraging the existing response landscape, as well as informing a locally owned agenda on the interlinkages between environmental change and human security on the road to COP30 and beyond.

BCSC-Rio was organised by adelphi global, the German Federal Foreign Office, the Igarapé Institute, and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Since its inauguration in 2019, BCSC has become the global forum connecting governments, international organisations, experts, and practitioners. Its main edition in Berlin, as well as its regional conferences, helps set the agenda in the lead up to important international fora like the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) on climate, land degradation and desertification, and on biodiversity. This Practical Note provides an overview of the discussions that took place at BCSC-Rio, highlighting its key takeaways and ways forward. It also details the forthcoming steps required to further these initiatives.

Pantanal wetlands © sabino-jose/pixabay

The city of Canoas during the 2024 floods in Rio Grande do Sul state, part of an affected area roughly the size of the United Kingdom.

Key takeaways

Climate security in the Brazilian context

Climate change is a threat multiplier that intensifies existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. The way these manifest varies across countries and regions. Brazil faces a multifaceted set of challenges where climate change, environmental degradation, and human security intersect. Five key pathways demonstrate how these dynamics are deeply intertwined: land-related conflicts, water-related disputes, environmental crime, hazards and extreme weather events, and improper implementation of climate and environmental policies. These pathways not only threaten Brazil's ecosystems but also exacerbate vulnerabilities, especially among its most marginalised groups, such as Indigenous peoples and Quilombola (afro-Brazilian) communities, and riparian populations.

Land-related conflicts are among the most prominent risks, as traditional populations face displacement, violence, and loss of livelihoods due to deforestation, mining, and agribusiness expansion. For instance, land grabbing in the Amazon increased by over 300% between 2018 and 2023, with nearly 20,000 rural properties occupying Indigenous lands and conservation areas as of 2024. Similarly, **water-related disputes** have intensified despite Brazil's abundant freshwater resources. An almost five-fold increase in conflicts related to access to and use of water between 2005-2021 highlights the growing competition for this resource. Large-scale agricultural activities and hydropower projects, such as the Belo Monte dam, have contributed to water scarcity, pollution, and displacement in several areas of the country, disrupting local livelihoods and increasing food insecurity.

Environmental crimes, including illegal logging, mining and wildlife trafficking, represent another critical pathway. These activities, often driven by organised crime, fuel deforestation, biodiversity loss, and violence against traditional communities and environmental defenders. In 2023 alone, 25 defenders were murdered

in Brazil. **Extreme weather events**, such as floods, droughts, and wildfires, are another source of risks. In 2023, climate-induced disasters displaced over 745,000 people. The following year, unprecedented floods in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul alone affected up to 2.4 million people and displaced nearly 600,000 individuals.

Finally, **improper implementation of climate and environmental policies** can exacerbate human security risks. Carbon credit projects, for example, often assign high economic value to land for reforestation or conservation purposes, which incentivises land grabbing by external actors seeking to profit from these initiatives. Traditional communities are particularly vulnerable as they frequently lack formal land titles, making it easier for their lands to be claimed or forcibly taken. Despite their critical role in conserving forests, populations living on these lands often receive minimal to no financial benefits.

Though Brazil has a vast response landscape of policies and policy actors tasked with addressing these issues, implementation is still a key challenge due to issues such as insufficient funding, lack of cross-agency cooperation, the influence of corporate lobbies as well as political polarisation of the climate agenda.

Criminality accelerates climate change

Although climate shocks and stressors impact security in Brazil, it is equally important to examine how the country's chronic public security challenges exacerbate climate risks. Illegal mining, for example, not only leads to human rights violations such as forced labour and gender-based violence but also pollutes soil and water bodies, undermining the health and livelihoods of local communities. These environmental damages reduce the capacity of ecosystems to provide essential services, thereby weakening resilience to climate change. Similarly, land grabbing displaces traditional communities, fuels conflicts, but also accelerates deforestation, which contributes to carbon emissions and biodiversity loss. In this way, security challenges are not only a consequence of climate change but also a significant driver of greenhouse gas emissions and environmental harm.

Engaging with Brazil on CPS: A matter of what and where

Brazil, alongside fellow BRICS members, has historically shown scepticism to the Climate, Peace and Security agenda. This is often attributed to fears of securitizing the climate agenda. In the Brazilian case, the fear of external intervention, especially in relation to the natural resources in the Amazon region, is a decades-old reservation that unites both sides of the political spectrum. Moreover, the focus of many CPS discussions on civil wars does not necessarily resonate on a continent where many security threats stem from crime-related violence.

The resistance is especially noticeable at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where Brazil does not have permanent membership or veto power. The current Lula administration has been outspoken about the need for a reform of the UNSC. Though fears of securitization persist in Brazilian diplomacy, the country acknowledges the connections between climate change and human security. One way to corroborate this is through the different strategies the country has been using to address its internal issues, such as strategies for increased climate resilience, early warning systems and increased food security which have made Brazil in 2025 once again leave FAO's Hunger Map.

The issue, therefore, is finding the most appropriate fora for advancing discussions and cooperating on climate, peace and security issues. Food security, for example, is one issue within the CPS nexus that Brazil has historically been very proactively addressing in global fora. In 2024, in the context of the G20, the country proposed the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, a multilateral treaty launched during the G20 leaders' summit in Rio de Janeiro currently with 101 member countries. Regionally, in the context of the Amazonian Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), Brazil is cooperating with fellow Amazonian countries in reducing vulnerabilities in the region, increasing resilience of traditional communities across

Brazil's environmental police seize over 7,000 illegally harvested logs from the Pirititi Indigenous Land in Roraima

the region and in exchanging police intelligence to combat environmental crimes. Whereas it remains to be seen to what extent different topics on the CPS agenda will feature at COP30, Brazil's COP presidency has been particularly vocal on issues such as climate finance and the protection of Indigenous communities.

Environmental crime as a global climate security issue

Environmental crime is increasingly recognised as a critical security issue, as it undermines the stability of ecosystems and communities. It is currently the world's third most lucrative criminal activity, behind only drug trafficking and smuggling. It is also increasingly becoming enmeshed with global organized crime. By fuelling corruption, financing organised crime, exacerbating resource conflicts, and jeopardising climate-regulating ecosystems like the Amazon, environmental offences pose significant risks to local, national, and global security. In Brazil, the issue is particularly acute, with an average of 4,000 cases per month since 2020. Addressing this challenge requires action not only at the national level, but also through international cooperation.

In this context, Brazil has sought to advance the discussion of environmental crime within multilateral forums, including through the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). As environmental crimes are not explicitly covered by the Convention—largely due to the absence of an agreed international definition—Brazil, together with Peru and France, presented a proposal for a specific protocol under UNTOC to address these offences directly.

The three countries identified illegal mining, flora (especially timber), and fauna as key areas for targeted protocols, with waste trafficking added to reflect the priorities of other countries. The resolution was adopted and an expert group was created to identify relevant gaps in the international legal framework as well as possible responses.

Next steps

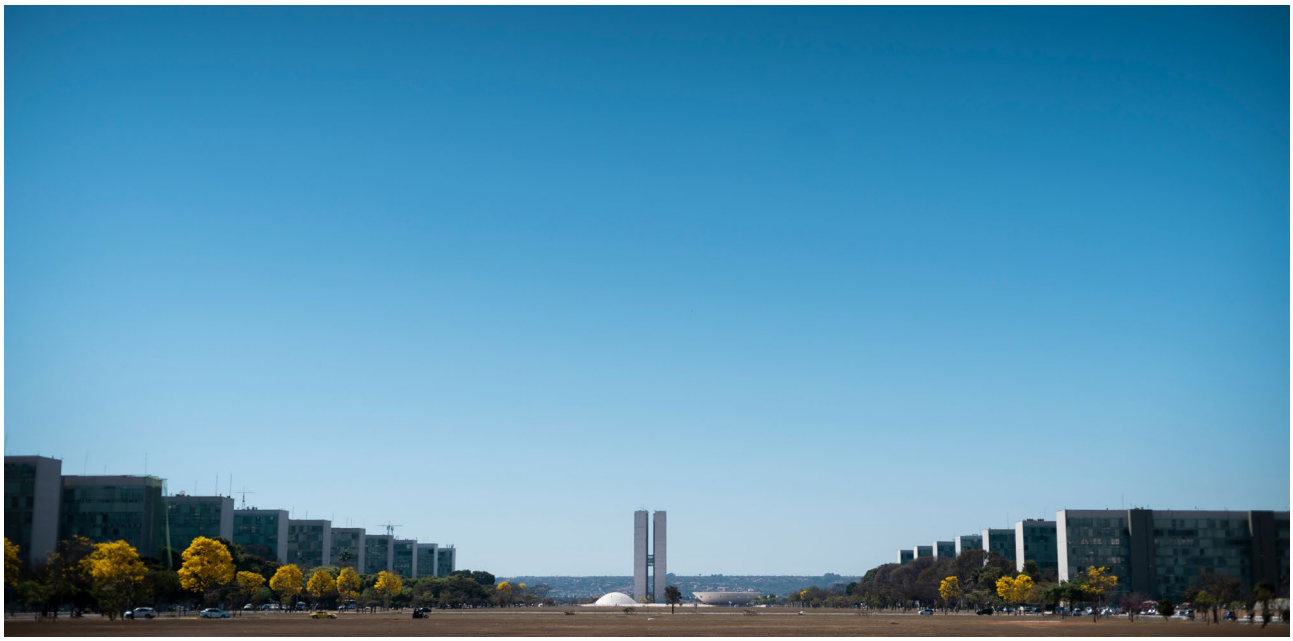
The discussions and outcomes of BCSC-Rio highlight the urgent and multifaceted nature of the climate, environment, and human security challenges in Brazil and the wider region. While there may not always be consensus on the ideal fora for addressing Climate, Peace, and Security (CPS) challenges, **there is broad agreement that CPS issues are real and pressing**, and that international cooperation to address these is fundamental.

Environmental crime is rapidly becoming a key concern not only for Brazil, but for countries across Latin America and beyond. Environmental crime's role in both destroying critical global carbon sinks and undermining human, public and international security makes it a critical jigsaw piece for the climate security agenda. To ensure that this crucial issue features more prominently on the climate security agenda, we need the voices of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in global discussions. Addressing these challenges requires **recognising the transnational nature of environmental crimes**, and the shared responsibility of producing countries, purchasing markets and multinational companies whose equipment is used in these criminal activities.

Progress will depend on **strengthening the capacity of key institutions**, improving agency coordination, and investing in enforcement and monitoring, particularly in combating environmental crime. Supporting and empowering vulnerable communities must also remain central. Such goals can be achieved by, for example, protecting land rights, expanding sustainable livelihoods, and enabling grassroots advocacy through safeguarding the rights of environmental defenders.

It is also important to **foster inclusive dialogue**, engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders. There are multiple fora where collaboration with Brazil can be advanced, including the G20, UNTOC, and other consensus-based platforms such as the Peacebuilding Commission. International partners seeking to engage with Brazil should recognise the country's unique context and sensitivities and seek to align support with the country's priorities, such as on food security and sustainable forest conservation.

Ultimately, overcoming Brazil's climate and human security challenges will depend on **fostering resilient, locally owned solutions** that bridge the gap between international frameworks and realities on the ground. As Brazil prepares to host COP30, it is essential that climate and human security challenges are included in the discussions, and that inclusive action is prioritised to safeguard both people and planet.



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