

Brazil

Written by Rodger A Payne

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Brazil

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RODGER A PAYNE, NOV 15 2009

Will a new climate agreement require developing countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (ghgs)? Will developing states agree to make reductions? In this post, let's consider the prospects for Brazil agreeing to such reductions.

First however, keep in mind the history. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, signed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, noted the special circumstances faced by relatively poor countries:

[Convention parties note] that the largest share of historical and current global emissions of greenhouse gases has originated in developed countries, that per capita emissions in developing countries are still relatively low and that the share of global emissions originating in developing countries will grow to meet their social and development needs

As a consequence of these special circumstances, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (which entered into force in 2005), made no requirements that developing states reduce emissions.

The United States Senate unanimously passed the Byrd-Hagel Resolution in summer 1997, declaring that the U.S. would not ratify an agreement that did not require developing country emissions reductions. Likewise, President George W. Bush opposed Kyoto because it exempted states like China and India.

This weekend, in the leadup to Copenhagen, Brazil announced that it will reduce ghg emissions by 36% by 2020. Cynics might note that this is a voluntary reduction, Brazil is not agreeing to mandatory cuts at this level.

Yet, the planned reductions are not altogether unrealistic given the dramatic decrease in deforestation in Brazil this past year. As the *Christian Science Monitor* reported a few days ago:

Some 7,008 square kilometers (2,706 square miles) of the Amazon was destroyed in the year preceding July, almost half the amount of the previous 12 months and the lowest annual total since officials started keeping records in 1988...

"The new deforestation data represents an extraordinary and significant reduction for Brazil," President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said.

About three-fourths of Brazil's ghg emissions come from deforestation.

This reduction in deforestation rates may partly reflect the decline in the world economy, so observers should not get too excited by the latest data. Also, as John Sauven of Greenpeace notes in the op-ed linked in this paragraph, the 7000 acres of the Amazon lost this past year is about the size of Puerto Rico. That is significant for those worried about biological diversity and preservation of the Amazon.

Still, for those of us interested in the politics of climate change, the news this weekend is significant. Amazon deforestation can be slowed and Brazil is willing to make this permanent in order to meet ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. President Lulu, as he's called, says Brazil can reduce deforestation by 80% by 2020.

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Incidentally, readers of this blog living in the most affluent states can do something about Brazil's goals. Greenpeace calculates that 80% of deforestation accommodates cattle ranching, which is something to think about next time you order a steak or hamburger.

About the author:

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