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Read the interview with **Dr Jose Carlos Carvalho, State Secretary for Environment and Sustainable Development of Minas Gerais**, who will be taking part in the World Forestry Congress as keynote speaker on “Organizing forest development”.

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State Secretary for Environment and Sustainable Development of Minas Gerais

Brazilia – Rome, FAO headquarters. In recent months, Brazil’s forest law enforcement authorities have seized some 30 000 m³ of mahogany harvested illegally from indigenous lands. However, despite Brazil’s best efforts, deforestation continues in the Amazon. Compounding the situation, although developed countries decry tropical deforestation, neither governments nor markets currently remunerate tropical countries for their biodiversity. Read the following interview with **Dr Jose Carlos Carvalho, State Secretary for Environment and Sustainable Development of Minas Gerais**, keynote speaker on “Organizing forest development” at the XIII World Forestry Congress.

Q. How has the forest sector in Brazil been affected by the worldwide economic crisis? What comparative advantages do Brazil’s forests have?

A. In Brazil, as in other countries, the forest sector has been affected by the downturn in demand for forest products and by-products, with a consequent fall in prices – as has also happened for most agricultural and other commodities. It is important to highlight the fact that the crisis has been particularly detrimental to those areas of the timber sector that work with sustainable forest management, inasmuch as the reduction in demand has evened out prices at a lower level, ignoring compensation for the environmental and social costs of the sustainable use of wood and non-wood forest resources.

However, **as the timber economy in Brazil is based on high-yield silviculture (40 m³/ha/year), the country has a comparative advantage**, even in the face of the crisis, especially in the cellulose, wood-based energy and mechanical timber processing sectors.

Q. What is the main impact of deforestation (especially in Amazonia) locally, regionally and globally?

A. Deforestation in Amazonia, as a closed biome, has a huge environmental impact, although this has been decreasing in recent years. The first major impact of deforestation in Amazonia is connected with the loss of the biodiversity associated with the very rich forest ecosystems of the region, followed by damage to soil fertility at the local level. **At regional and global levels, especially in inland Amazonia and other regions in southern central Brazil, if the rate of deforestation is not reduced, removal of plant cover can affect rainfall, as has been scientifically demonstrated.** However, should the most pessimistic scenario of the IPCC prevail, Amazonia could experience a reverse effect, especially considering that

scientific studies already carried out indicate that areas of savannah are increasing in the region as a result of a definite rise in temperatures. The major problem of global warming is thus raised in the context of the protection of Amazonia.

Q. What are the main mechanisms adopted by the Brazilian Government to reduce or prevent deforestation, and what results have been achieved?

A. Because of its geographical size, Brazil, especially Amazonia, unlike other countries with consolidated territorial occupation, still has a mobile economic frontier in the north, and this is advancing on the forest, mainly through farming activities. **This situation means that the Brazilian Government's main challenge is that of redirecting public and private investment in the Amazon Basin and placing land occupation on a sustainable basis.** Various incentives have been adopted to this end, such as greater legal restrictions on the conversion of forest land into arable land, intensification of the official monitoring and control of deforestation, a more selective use of economic incentives for regional development and the redirecting of rural credit to areas that have been deforested in the past. These incentives will lead to a reduction in deforestation rates, but are still not enough to change the regional development model, which is in many cases still strongly linked to the exploitative use of natural resources.

Q. In your opinion, what result was achieved by the 1988 constitutional reform, which delegated responsibility for forests to the various states of the federation? Was this beneficial for forests? If so, in what way?

A. Besides fully restoring the democratic rule of law and political freedoms, the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 introduced another major advance in the form of a new federal agreement based on decentralized management, bestowing greater powers on federal bodies. However, **the Brazilian federation lacks symmetry because of differences among the socio-economic levels of the various regions.** This state of affairs meant that some states benefited more than others from the new constitution. In the forest sector, silviculture-based development made remarkable strides. Almost 90 percent of the country's forest plantations are found in the southern and southeastern states. With the creation of the Brazilian Forest Service, decentralization efforts have recently been extended to the northeast and central west of Brazil, albeit without the institutional support of the central government.

In Amazonia, the continuing prominence of the federal government and the lack of political interest in controlling deforestation in the majority of states, with the exception of Amazonas and Acre, have practically ruled out any decentralization on the scale anticipated in the constitution. It may be concluded that **forests in the regions of central southern Brazil benefited greatly, creating an economically, socially and environmentally strong and totally institutionalized forest sector, whereas this is only now slowly beginning to occur in the northeast and central west.** Nevertheless, there remains the challenge of developing a forest policy that is more in tune with the Brazilian context, including the expansion of reforestation activities, incentivization of the sustainable forest management of Amazonia's enormous stock of timber, research into indigenous species of economic and environmental value, and support for forest-based industry.