

How Advocacy for the Amazon Rainforest Has Evolved

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In a landmark report, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) concluded that the current rate of ecosystem destruction is “unprecedented in human history” (IPBES, 2019). Deforestation is devastating the Amazon rainforest, and is mainly due to the actions of humans. The Amazon moderates the global climate through interactions with the atmosphere (Vourlitis, et al., 2002), and is one of the most ecologically diverse places on earth. Over one and a half million indigenous people inhabit the Amazon, and depend on the forest for their livelihood (Silveira, n.d.).

Governments from nations across the world enact policies that can either augment or impair the conservation effort. Conservationist advocacies are striving to optimize their efforts to protect the Amazon from these environmental threats. Advocacies are using new techniques to publicize conservation needs. Hungerford and Volk (1990), however, found that publicity is not sufficient. Some advocacies are therefore working to hold governments and corporations accountable for their conservation responsibilities.

Review of Research

According to Wapner (1995), nongovernmental organizations (NGOS) lobby states to advance their interests. In a 2012 study, Chakravarty and Shukl investigated deforestation across the globe and how it could be mitigated. These two studies can both be applied to the problem of deforestation in the Amazon, but are too broad in scope to definitively answer the question of how activists protect the Amazon currently.

In a “retrospective analysis” of the 2009 Iranian presidential election, Gaffney (2010) attempted to quantify Twitter’s effect on the election. He found that Twitter was an effective tool of dissidence, raising awareness about the election to a more global audience. Perez et al. (2015) the environmental justice movement has engaged in a “broadening of missions and reach.” In the movement to protect the Amazon rainforest activists have also innovated to spread their reach.

Activism through Online Educational Platforms

Online Education in Schools

Online educational platforms can reach students across the globe. The nonprofit Amazon Aid Foundation (AAF) uses media to publicize threats to the Amazon, in part through an educational platform and a curriculum for middle and high school students. Sarah duPont, the founder, states AAF’s goal is to “create scientifically impeccable multi-media to educate global audiences about the importance of the Amazon” (duPont, n.d.). Similar to AAF, ARCAmazon, a Peruvian nonprofit, offers an online educational platform to deliver “media, art, and informative content for sharing” (2019).

The Rainforest Partnership is an American nonprofit that works to “spread the word on rainforest conservation to local classrooms in the community” (Rainforest Education, 2018). A wide variety of educational resources about the Amazon rainforest are mainly aimed towards a younger audience, for example through “study.com” (Amazon Rainforest Facts, 2016). According to Dettmann-Easler and Pease (1999), students who use environmental educational programs have “significantly more positive attitudes toward wildlife.”

Redefining Scope

Advocacies use online educational platforms to target more specific demographics for better content delivery. Baker and Williamson found that many activists use satellite imagery of the Amazon to “convey useful information to a broader, non-expert audience” (2006). The World Rainforest Fund (n.d.) provides education to a wide variety of groups, including “service clubs ... business groups, schools at all levels from pre-school to college, churches, and any other interested organizations.” Grist is an online publication that publishes environmental news, with a mission to “motivate readers to take action on behalf of the environment” (Grist, 2020). With the internet, they deliver content monthly to 2 million readers.

Other advocacies collaborate with indigenous groups to protect the Amazon. Amazon Watch works with indigenous organizations (Amazon Watch, n.d.), and the Amazon Conservation Team “partners with indigenous and other local communities” (Amazon Conservation Team, n.d.), sponsoring educational programs for children in Brazil, Colombia, and Suriname. The Detroit Zoological Society (DZS) has partnered with the Conservacion de la Naturaleza Amazonica del Peru, A.C. (CONAPAC) to “protect and conserve the Amazon rainforest through education” (Lannoye-Hall, 2019). The DZS provides both school supplies and workshops that help incorporate rainforest ecology into the curriculum of local schools. With the use of online education activists are now able to deliver their content in a more deliberate manner to increase their effectiveness.

Evolving Educational Frameworks

Game Based Learning

Gamification is “the process of adding gamelike elements to something (such as a task) so as to encourage participation” (“Gamification,” n.d.). Many environmental organizations have been making use of this technique. The AmazonAid foundation offers an online educational platform with which students can use to play various minigames about the Amazon and the threats it faces (Mission, n.d.). Dr. Gerald Urquhart, a professor at Michigan State University, runs “The Virtual Rainforest,” a site to be “used as much as possible to teach students about tropical rainforests” (n.d.).

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) offers a game called “Amazon Explorer,” which walks players through a series of guided scenarios in the Amazon rainforest (PBS, n.d.). Gamification improves student engagement (Seixas, Gomes, & Filho, 2016; De-Marcos, Garcia-Lopez, & Garcia-Cabot, 2016), and environmental activists are applying it.

Mobile Learning

Mobile learning is “learning across multiple contexts, through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices” (Crompton, 2013). The Pew Research Center found that in 2019, 81 percent of Americans owned [**Owned what?**], while only 35 percent did in 2011 (2019). The worldwide market for mobile learning products has been growing at a 22.7 percent rate annually (2019). Shih, Chuang, and Hwang (2010) found that for elementary school students, mobile learning yields “significant positive results in terms of the student’s learning.” Such benefits extend to learning about environmental issues (Cavus, Ercag, & Uzunboylu, 2009).

As educators integrate this kind of learning, they are seeing promising results, including curriculum flexibility and opportunities to use online learning platforms such as the AmazonAid's. José Picardo, an assistant principal at Surbiton High School, stated that his school's experiment with mobile learning helped to "demonstrably support teaching and learning" (2016).

Other organizations have also begun to use this approach, such as the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). The organization stated "By integrating the two seemingly opposed areas of nature and technology, we can create an opportunity for young children to become both environmentally and technologically literate" (Willis, Weiser, & Kirkwood, 2018). The NAAEE offers many different educational mediums that deal with the Amazon Rainforest. Once such program allows for educators to give students a guided tour of the Amazon virtually, which could obviously integrate with mobile learning techniques (NAAEE, n.d.). As personal computing becomes more common activists will continue to lean on mobile learning in order to deliver their content in a more engaging manner.

Pressuring Corporations

Agribusiness in the Amazon

In the Amazon rainforest over forty-eight million hectares been cleared for agricultural purposes, making agribusiness of the leading causes of deforestation ("Land use and Agriculture in the Amazon", n.d.). The Bureau of Investigative Journalism found that ranching still persists in areas where it has been embargoed by Brazil's environmental agency, showing just how ingrained agriculture is in this area. To combat the threat posed by agribusiness, some activist groups have tried to publicly expose the offending organizations. By doing so these activists are

hoping to pressure these organizations into changing their practices in an effort to save face. The nonprofit Amazon Watch published an announcement calling for the “banks and institutional investors... to immediately suspend all financing to agribusiness firms active in the Brazilian Amazon and Cerrado” (“Stand with the Amazon”, n.d.). Kommunal Landspensjonskasse (KLP) is a Norwegian mutual insurance company that has taken a similar approach to Amazon Watch. Jeanett Bergan, their Head of Responsible Investments, vowed to engage in “rapid dialogues and concrete actions” with companies who “undertake significant trade in agricultural products from Brazil” (Johansen, 2019).

Ranching accounts for eighty percent of deforestation in the Amazon (Nepstad et al., 2008). Some environmental advocates, such as the World Wildlife Fund, try and raise awareness regarding this issue in an effort to curb its harmful effects (“Unsustainable Cattle Ranching,” n.d.). Other groups, such as the Brazilian NGO Instituto Centro de Vida, work more directly to mitigate the effects of ranching. They are working to make existing pastures more efficient and sustainable so that no more land has to be cleared to meet demands (Instituto Centro de Vida, n.d.). As deforestation from agricultural pursuits continues to worsen, it is clear that both conventional environmental organizations and other stakeholders are willing to put pressure on those participating in agribusiness in the Amazon through a variety of means.

Natural Resource Extraction

Oil companies have also taken an interest in the Amazon, continually exploring different sites where oil may be available. The impacts of these ventures include deforestation, biodiversity loss, and an increase in pollution (Sayer, n.d.). As a result, activist organizations are trying to enforce restrictions on oil companies looking to profit off the Amazon. The Rainforest

Partnership, a nonprofit organization, works directly with communities in the rainforest “to help them become economically sustainable so that they are empowered to say no to oil companies looking to drill in their lands” (Spelman, 2018). Work to combat oil drilling is also being done at the local level. Nemonte Nenquimo, a leader of the confederation of the Waorani, led an effort to “mobilize so that no petroleum would never enter my territory” (Sax, 2019). As a result of her and her people’s efforts they won a landmark lawsuit that suspended the possibility of selling their land for oil exploration (Brown, 2019). At both the global and local level environmental activists are putting the pressure on companies looking to exploit the Amazon for oil.

The Amazon contains large quantities of many mineral resources, such as copper, gold, and nickel. A 2017 study found that roughly ten percent of all deforestation in the Amazon comes from these mining practices, which was much higher than previous estimates (Sonter, et al.). One group of activists, mainly comprised of workers affected by the mining, staged a protest to oppose the operations of Vale, a company heavily involved in mining operations in the Amazon (Recinos, n.d.). Similar protests have happened in London, where groups have gathered to protest Anglo American, another mining giant heavily involved in the Amazon rainforest. The organizer of one of these protests, Lydia James, wanted to make company investors “aware of the true impacts of their investments on people and planet” (James, 2019). The indigenous peoples of the Amazon are also taking the fight to these mining corporations. In an interview with BBC, Aldinéson Pavão, a leader of the Urucurituba village, regarded those from the Potássio do Brasil company as “invaders”, as they were looking to start mining on ancestral land (BBC, 2020). His people were able to mobilize and reach a deal with the company to halt the mining project until further consultation had taken place. Organizers at both national and local

levels are continually working to hold mining companies accountable for their practices in the Amazon.

Working with Government Organizations

Governmental organizations play a large role in the conservation effort, as they have the capacity to enact and enforce legislation that can either assist or hinder activists working to protect the Amazon. During the Amazon fires in late 2019, the Group of Seven (G7) pledged tens of millions of dollars to help Amazon countries fight the fires (Henao, 2019). Seemingly offended, the Brazilian government rejected the offer, seeing it as “interference”, or “help we didn’t ask for” (Gurzu 2019). Occurrences such as this are common and show just how much of an effect government across the globe can have on the conservation effort, and why it is so important for activists to try and influence them as much as possible.

Protesting to Raise Awareness

Many have protested the Brazilian government to hold them accountable for the health of the Amazon. In 2017, around 3000 indigenous people from the Amazon region organized to stage a protest in regards to funding cuts to FUNAI, the governmental agency that oversees policies relating to indigenous people (Schiffman, 2017). Other activists around the globe have also taken a similar approach recently. In late 2019 protesters around the world organized at Brazilian embassies to voice their concern regarding president Jair Bolsonaro’s lack of response to the fires in the Amazon. A columnist from the O Globo newspaper even stated that this response painted Brazil as an “environmental pariah” (Phillips & Phillips 2019).

Environmental advocacy groups also take part in protesting, such as the Climate Save Movement, a global nonprofit with a goal to “end animal agriculture and reforest the earth to bring down the atmospheric carbon content” (“Learn More”, n.d.). Members from this group organized a protest outside the Brazilian embassy in London in an effort to raise awareness about deforestation (Gilliver, 2019). Activists have also staged protest in response to government policies regarding natural resource extraction in the Amazon. In 2017 Brazil’s president Michel Temer removed the protected status of a national reserve in the forest, making it open to mining exploration. As a result, Brazilians took to the street to voice their displeasure in protest. (Garcia, 2017). At both the local and international level environmental activists have protested governmental bodies to further advance their cause and better protect the Amazon.

Lobbying and Legislation

Activists can also exert their influence in a more direct manner through both creating and lobbying for legislation that better protects the Amazon. Employees of Ibama, Brazil’s main environmental agency, signed an open letter detailing on how their effectiveness has been hampered by President Bolsonaro. Members of the agency felt almost persecuted under Bolsonaro, as one employee remarked “I don’t know how any organization can develop in a climate of fear and terror” (Londoño & Casado, 2019). Facing pressure from his own constituents, Bolsonaro vowed to take a “zero tolerance” approach on the enforcement of environmental laws.

Activists from across the globe in from countries outside the reach of the Amazon have also tried to influence legislation. Peter DeFazio, a United States Congressman representing Oregon’s 4th district, introduced the “Act for the Amazon”. The act aimed to “pressure President

Bolsonaro to act on an aggressive plan to fight the Amazon wildfires and reduce deforestation” (The United States Congress, OR-04, 2019). Similar strategies have also been applied on the global front. In response to the same fires, the EU threatened to oppose a trade deal in response to Bolsonaro’s seeming indifference (Paraguassu, 2019).

Chris Murphy and Brian Schatz are United States Senators, representing Connecticut and Hawaii respectively. In an opinion article they published on NBC, they stressed the importance of the 2019 fires in the Amazon, classifying them as a “national security crisis” (Schatz & Murphy, 2019). To rectify this, they stated they would look at amending the Lacey Act to help ensure that no imports from Brazil came from illegally deforested areas. Both those directly and indirectly involved with the legislation process have the ability to influence governmental bodies to better protect the Amazon.

Conclusion

In the modern world many organizations are focused on progress and innovation. While this mindset not inherently negative, some pursue these goals without considering the ramifications of their actions. Many organizations are now using more aggressive tactics to pursue their interests, usually at the cost of the environment. The Amazon rainforest has been hit particularly hard by this phenomenon. As it is the largest rainforest in the world, it is home to a multitude of natural resources that many organizations are in need of.

To protect the Amazon against these different threats, environmental activists have had to evolve their strategy and work in areas that may have been unfamiliar to them before. With the rise of the internet and mobile technology, advocacy groups of all types have been able to deliver their content in a more effective manner, as they have the ability to deliver their content in a

more effective manner. Activists have also started to work more directly with government agencies across the world. An increased sense of globalization has allowed for those physically outside the Amazon to still get involved in the conservation cause. This extension of each is true for many different activist groups, as many are now able to have a more direct influence on the legislation process. The combination of these tactics has allowed for modern activists to exert influence on both the individual and the institution in pursuit of their goals.

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