DCAF

Geneva Centre
for Security Sector
Governance

Stocktaking of security sector roles in climate and environmental security

Report on Brazil

May
2023

Executive Summary

Brazil, the most biodiverse country in the world, with roughly 60% of the Amazon rainforest within its territory, is especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and other environmental risks. Brazil has vast natural resources and is one of the major exporters of agricultural products, minerals, and oil. However, extreme temperatures, drought, water scarcity and flooding, coupled with human-led environmental degradation and environmental crimes, undermine human security, and threaten the country's socioeconomic development. Vulnerable groups including indigenous peoples and refugees are affected the most.

Although Brazilian civilian institutions are primarily responsible for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and environmental protection, in recent years the security sector has played an increasingly prominent role in addressing natural disasters and especially environmental crime. Recognizing that environmental risks are multifaceted and require inter-agency and cross-sectorial cooperation, this study explores the role of security actors in preparedness and protection, as well as the boundaries for its engagement in climate change adaptation (CCA), DRR and environmental protection.

The Brazilian government and Brazilian communities have invaluable experience protecting the environment and addressing environmental crime across a vast, complex, and biodiverse area. Approaches have evolved over time and offer important insights – for example related to data-driven and technology-enabled approaches to tackling environmental crime - which are applicable across a range of contexts.

The stocktaking study identified potential for security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) to enhance effective security provision related to climate and environmental risks through integrating human security approaches into preparedness and protection activities. This entails strengthening the capacities of security actors, coordination between federal, state, and municipal levels, and closer cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as an increased focus on the needs of vulnerable communities including migrants and refugees. This report includes practical recommendations for international donors and Brazilian government stakeholders.

Main Findings

➢ The **role of security institutions in environmental protection has increased** in recent years, in some cases replacing previous efforts on the part of environmental protection agencies to prevent environmental crime. In Brazil's current political context, it is possible the balance between security and civilian environmental agencies will shift again. However, the stakes are high for exploiting natural resources in the Amazon and the critical importance of protecting this area, combined with the links between environmental and other forms of serious crime, make it likely the security sector will continue playing a prominent role in coming years.

- It is important to capitalize on recent lessons learned and to **ensure a human security orientation to future security operations** in this domain, to include creating more spaces for dialogue between security institutions and communities.

➢ Brazil has a **comprehensive legislative framework for environmental protection**, with specific provisions related to indigenous and traditional use of natural resources. The framework is also complex, particularly when it comes to the jurisdiction of federal, state and local authorities. While further research would be required to fully map where gaps and overlaps occur, it seems clear that the **complexity has the potential to affect the timeliness and efficacy of responses**, for instance when environmental crime crosses internal Brazilian state boundaries.

➢ DRR and environmental protection capacities are distributed across the national, subnational and municipal levels of governance and **capacities vary significantly across levels and security sector actors**.

- Whereas **early warning systems** are more widespread and accessible at the national level and in large urban areas such as Rio de Janeiro, vulnerable communities including indigenous peoples and migrants and refugees in Boa Vista, Roraima (the area of focus for this study) have difficulties accessing such mechanisms.

- The Federal Police requires accompaniment of the Military Police, Army, or Navy for operations due to differences in equipment and logistical capacity. Similarly, Municipal Guards and State Military Police and Fire Brigades often require support of the Army and Navy due to insufficient boats and/ or vehicles. As with questions of jurisdiction noted above, the results are **complex coordination and differences in the effectiveness and quality of service delivery**.

➢ Security sector actors (especially at the municipal level) and local communities expressed that security sector organizations are understaffed and

under-resourced. **Satellite mapping and remote monitoring technologies** have been key to overcoming some of these resource limitations to counter deforestation and for DRR efforts. These tools allow monitoring of areas where permanent presence of the security sector is not feasible and contribute to enhancing DRR preparedness, response time and the ability of institutions to plan and prioritize interventions.

➤ **Cooperation and information sharing –** among government agencies and between these agencies and communities - are essential for addressing and preventing environmental crime. However, **substantial barriers to cooperation exist** due to both the reported involvement of government officials (as well as communities) in environmental crime; and to relatively low levels of community trust in the security sector, caused in part by perceptions of impunity for the increasing levels of violence associated with the extraction of natural resources.

➤ Experience has shown that **repressive approaches to tackling environmental crime are less effective over the longer term**. They may have a quick effect/impact as they result in the arrest of people involved in illegal activities. However, the effect is only temporary, and a new problem is created due to the loss of people's livelihoods. Those affected are often forced to migrate to find new job opportunities. Others get involved in other types of crimes, which creates a series of new issues.

- Operations including affirmative, sustainable development actions require inter-agency and cross-sectoral cooperation, additional time and resources, but tend to better address the root causes of communities' involvement in illegal operations.

➤ As in many other contexts, **already vulnerable communities are particularly exposed to climate and environmental risks**, from landslides and flooding to a loss of access to food (fish) and clean water as illegal mining contaminates rivers. Government responses at the local level are not in all cases accessible to the most vulnerable members of society. As one example, migrants in temporary settlements are highly exposed to flooding, but without cell phones or network coverage they do not benefit from early warning systems.

➤ The relationship between communities and the environment has the potential to be a source of resilience, particularly in cases in which the local population has been living sustainably for generations. It also holds the **potential for tension and local conflict**.

Photo: CDI Brazil

- Police sometimes assign officers from outside the local area to address cases of environmental harm in order to shield local police officers from the serious resentment created by their actions to counter environmental crime, and to avoid damaging their relationship with communities.

- Within and among communities, decisions around whether or not to be involved in crimes which harm the local environment (for instance, illegal mining) have also created local tensions.

- Violence associated with the extraction of natural resources – for example, land grabs and killings of environmental defenders – has been increasing.

Entry points for SSG/R

➤ Operations targeting the **humanitarian, development and security nexus** in a holistic manner are more likely to be effective for disaster risk reduction and environmental protection. Coordination between environmental and security actors is fundamental for designing effective interventions that tackle environmental risks. Droughts and flooding, as well as illegal operations in logging, mining, and land use/ownership, can be approached by integrating **civil society participation in environmental education, early warning systems and alternative livelihood programs**.

➤ Law enforcement alone is insufficient to address incidents of environmental crime. It is clear some environmental crime, namely that perpetrated by organized criminal groups, requires a strong and effective law enforcement response. However, it is often the case that individuals and communities involved in environmental harm (whether through subsistence practices or through involvement in criminal activities) have few alternatives in terms of source of income. While more time and effort may be required up front, **integrated solutions which address the development of alternative livelihoods as well as enforcing environmental law** are more likely to succeed over the longer term.

➤ **Security responses to climate and environmental risks must be informed and guided by specialized technical expertise.** This implies carefully examining the respective roles and mandates of security and other government institutions and developing coordinated approaches which correspond to the strengths, expertise and access of each institution. Ideally, security institutions can work closely with environmental and disaster agencies/ministries in planning and conducting operations. Where this is not possible, security institutions must have the training, doctrine/procedures, and expertise required for them to play an effective and appropriate role.

➤ **Risk-informed planning** is indispensable to both disaster risk reduction and tackling environmental crime. This is particularly true when covering large geographic areas with limited resources. It may include the use of sampling to detect illegal practices, collection and analysis of surveillance data to target operations, or an emphasis on financial intelligence to better identify and target groups involved in enterprises including transnational trafficking. For DRR, the use of remote monitoring technology can facilitate the collection of risk data in inaccessible or remote areas, inform early warning systems and enhance preparedness by providing an early response.

▪ Risk-informed planning goes beyond **technologically enabled aspects** of criminal investigations and includes a thorough analysis of **community needs**, for example to identify where at-risk communities may be particularly vulnerable to the economic opportunities offered by groups engaged in environmental crime or to specific disaster hazards.

➤ Governance of both security and natural resources takes place through a complex and interconnected set of relationships among individuals and institutions. It is important to examine these relationships, particularly where roles and responsibilities intersect (for instance, across national and subnational levels), to identify **gaps and areas where mismanagement or corruption are a risk**. It is equally important to critically examine **how human and financial resources are distributed across the system** and whether resource decisions are made at a level that enables effective responses.

Photo: Luiz Nistal

➤ **Communities are willing and able to play a role as key actors in climate security.** In some cases, traditional approaches to agriculture and natural resource management are important sources of resilience and can substantively complement what government institutions could offer when it comes to mitigating climate security risks. Security sector actors also emphasized the value of indigenous approaches for DRR and environmental conservation and the high level of preparedness of some local communities. In other cases, communities are eager to learn more about prohibited practices and sustainable alternatives, creating an opening for dialogue and awareness raising among communities, security institutions and civilian agencies.

➤ **Attention to the needs of vulnerable groups** is critical in the context of DRR and environmental protection.

- Communities including migrants who live in remote areas or informal urban settlements are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters including flooding and landslides; and yet may not have access to early warning systems or reliable information on risks and mitigation measures.

- Groups with limited economic opportunities may also be under pressure to participate in activities which harm the environment.

- Individuals and communities which have had negative interactions with security institutions may also be less likely to report environmental crimes.

➤ Climate and environmental risks are not limited by national boundaries, and there is a need to **support increased cooperation among security sector actors of neighboring countries.** In Brazil, for example, the Amazon is a natural corridor for criminal organizations. Cooperation initiatives that allow for lesson-learned exchanges involving security sector actors from the federal, state, and municipal levels can strengthen the effectiveness of environmental protection operations. Experience with other regional law enforcement initiatives has also shown that it is important to identify and address practical barriers which may exist, for example to sharing sensitive information as part of cross-border efforts to strengthen investigations and close gaps in enforcement.

SSG/R needs to mainstream climate and environmental risks so security sectors can help protect people, planet and peace