

WEATHERING RISK

PRACTICAL NOTE

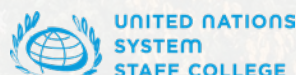
Advancing Latin American and Caribbean Leadership: Exploring practical solutions for climate, environment and peace

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Context

The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region is at the forefront of many diplomatic and grassroots efforts in environmental and climate action. The region is grappling with interconnected crises. Environmental degradation is intensifying through climate change-related droughts, hurricanes and floods, damaging infrastructure, disrupting economies, fuelling displacement and deepening social tensions. At the same time, the region faces chronic security challenges. LAC's homicide rate is the highest in the world—[three times the global average](#). Organised crime—illegal deforestation, illegal mining and drug trafficking—threatens human lives and the biodiversity of vital ecosystems, including the Cerrado, Pan-Amazon and Maya Forests and the Gran Chaco. These dynamics fuel the climate crisis, undermine communities' resilience to climate change impacts, amplify security risks, and obstruct the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite the urgency of the challenges, LAC is still not recognised as a priority region within global Climate, Peace and Security (CPS) discussions and international funding mechanisms. Moreover, the agenda is at times met with scepticism in the region. This includes concerns that international approaches may sideline local processes, knowledge and priorities, as well as fears of securitising climate policy and overlooking structural drivers of both climate and environmental degradation and conflict. At the same time, gaps remain in connecting the rich knowledge and experience of Latin American stakeholders—including policymakers, human rights and environmental defenders, Indigenous leaders, civil society organisations, and climate activists—to global policy debates, such as those within the CPS Agenda.

This practical note aims to centre LAC perspectives within global CPS discussions. It is the result of the collective knowledge shared during a workshop organised by adelphi global, the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) and the Igarapé Institute in October 2025 in Berlin, as an official side event of the [Berlin Climate and Security Conference](#). The workshop was designed to elevate LAC priorities and showcase best practices at the climate security nexus. Building on outcomes from [BCSC-Cali](#) (October 2024) and [BCSC-Rio](#) (June 2025), it convened civil society organisations, embassies, government representatives, UN agencies, youth leaders and donors to deepen the understanding of the complex links between climate change, environmental degradation and human security in LAC and, most importantly, to identify practical solutions stakeholders should prioritise to address these challenges.



Victoria amazonica plants. © Rodrigo Kugnarski/unsplash



Environmental police deactivate illegal mining equipment in Munduruku Indigenous Territory, Pará, Brazil

Key takeaways

1. Environmental crime undermines institutions

Environmental crime, the world's [third most lucrative illegal activity](#), is a critical issue in LAC, fuelling criminal economies, spreading violence, damaging biodiversity and livelihoods, and undermining institutions. In the Pan-Amazonian region, the operations of criminal organisations have become increasingly sophisticated and intertwined with drug cartel activities. These organisations now function as globalised networks operating across multiple sectors. When law enforcement disrupts one revenue stream, they quickly pivot to different illegal products. They form alliances and share logistics and infrastructure to optimise operations, demonstrating flexibility and resilience.

- **Lobby attempts to legalise environmental crime:** With substantial lobbying budgets, oil, agribusiness and mining companies wield considerable power to influence decision-making at the local and national levels. One prominent example is the recurrent attempts to [legalise mining in Indigenous territories](#) in Brazil. The legislative change is strongly criticised by environmentalists and Indigenous movements such as the [Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil](#).

2. Urban consequences of environmental crime

The impacts of criminal organisations extend beyond rural areas and conservation units, and are increasingly felt in cities

- **Increased vulnerability:** In the Amazonian context, violence driven by land conflict, large extractive industry operations and environmental crime fuels internal migration, pushing people into [vulnerable conditions](#) in urban settings. Displaced individuals are often exposed to exploitation, extortion, involvement in illicit economies and forms of modern slavery.

- **Accelerated urbanisation in the Brazilian Amazon:** Small towns are emerging to sustain both legal and illegal mining, cattle-driven deforestation and land conversion in the Brazilian Amazon. These settlements are critical nodes in illicit economies, yet are beyond the reach of both law enforcement and government services, leaving residents at the mercy of criminal actors. Within these urban settings, activities such as the storage of illegally sourced products and the laundering of gold are conducted openly.
- **Corrupt urban elites as facilitators:** Powerful actors deeply tangled in these processes undermine law enforcement and the protection of vulnerable groups, enabling environmental crime to flourish. These individuals often belong to political and economic elites, but may also be corrupt civil servants in charge of processes such as land titling, environmental inspection and policing.

3. Climate impacts contribute to migration in Central America

Climate shocks are significant drivers of migration dynamics in Central America. In El Salvador, hurricanes, droughts and irregular rainfall have devastated agriculture. Extreme precipitation events between 2009 and 2011 alone [caused losses and damages equivalent to 6% of the country's GDP](#). Land degradation intensifies these impacts: when forests are depleted, heavy rainfall washes through landscapes unimpeded, increasing damage and displacement and reinforcing climate as a driver of migration.

Good Practices

LAC's role in the fight against environmental crime

Internationally, LAC governments have helped drive progress on crimes that affect the environment. In October 2024, Peru and Brazil, together with France, tabled a resolution at the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) Conference of the Parties (COP) launching an open-ended [Intergovernmental Expert Group](#) to assess legal gaps and consider a dedicated UNTOC protocol on environmental crime. Additionally, at the Biodiversity COP16 in Colombia, the [Peace with Nature Coalition](#) helped connect biodiversity protection, environmental crime and human security, strengthening synergies between the UNFCCC and CBD COPs on this topic. Under the Brazilian presidency, COP30 has further brought environmental crime into the spotlight, with increased attention to the topic in multiple side events as well as in the [Belém Climate Summit Call to Action](#) on Integrated Fire Management and Wildfire Resilience and in the Action Agenda.

Increasing regional cooperation

Regional cooperation in LAC to tackle challenges at the CPS nexus is gaining momentum. The eight member states of the [Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization](#) (OTCA) are jointly promoting several initiatives for resilience and sustainable livelihoods across the Pan-Amazon. Since 2023, public security and tackling cross-border environmental crime have been included more centrally into ACTO's agenda. The Brazilian government has recently inaugurated the [Amazon International Police Cooperation Centre \(CCPI\)](#), which brings together police forces from the Pan-Amazonian countries alongside international actors such as Interpol to share intelligence and coordinate cross-border interventions against illicit activities such as environmental crimes. Complementing enforcement, the [Escazú Agreement](#)—currently ratified by 18 countries in the region—advances access to information, public participation and the safe-

guarding of environmental defenders. Another notable example is the [Leticia Pact](#), which strengthens cooperation in combating deforestation, wildfire response and disaster management.

Indigenous leadership in environmental protection

Across the region, Indigenous Peoples are leading on-the-ground implementation of environmental conservation, yet their contributions often remain invisible in policy and finance.

- **Indigenous lands' role in carbon absorption:** Across all Amazonian countries, Indigenous forests act as net carbon sinks, [absorbing approximately 340 million tonnes of CO2 annually](#).
- **Traditional practices increase resilience:** In Central America, rediscovered Indigenous agroforestry practices demonstrate how traditional knowledge sustains resilience. In El Salvador, for example, communities that re-adopted these methods were able to [avoid crop losses](#) during extreme rainfall events.
- **Partnerships for amplifying Indigenous voices:** When used effectively, technology can be a powerful ally in amplifying the voices from Indigenous territories. One such example in the Brazilian context is the [Indigenous Climate Alert](#). Developed by the Amazon Environmental Research Institute in partnership with several Indigenous organisations, such as the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon and the Raoni Institute, the tool enables Indigenous communities to report climate impacts and territorial threats including fires, deforestation or land-grabbing attempts. The project includes a partnership with the Public Prosecutor's Office, facilitating the use of community-generated evidence in judicial processes.

Women's leadership role in conflict-affected areas

Across LAC, women are leading several efforts to protect their territories and create sustainable livelihoods in conflict affected settings. In Colombia, for instance, the fashion brand Manifiesta provides job opportunities for ex combatants and survivors of violence, designing clothing in regions where private investment is scarce and economic opportunities are often limited to extractive activities. Despite their innovation and resilience, women are too often regarded as beneficiaries rather than implementers, with international organisations withdrawing whenever security risks rise—leaving locally-sustained initiatives exposed and underfunded.

Multistakeholder cooperation for climate, peace and security

Across Latin America and the Caribbean, several examples demonstrate how multiple stakeholders are coming together to address climate, environment and security risks in an integrated way. In Haiti, for example, environmental fragility contributes to social conditions that are exploited by armed actors, reinforcing cycles of insecurity. Understanding these cycles is crucial for action, yet is a daunting task amid the country's overlapping political, economic and humanitarian crises. To navigate this complexity, the [Climate Security Working Group](#) brought together Haitian government institutions, UN agencies, NGOs and Haitian civil society organisations to analyse the situation and articulate shared priorities that link climate risks with security dynamics. This collaborative process is helping align advocacy around decentralised, community-led responses and make the case for targeted climate security finance—ensuring resources reach local initiatives capable of strengthening resilience.



World leaders gathered in Belém, Brazil for COP30

Action areas for different stakeholders

For governments:

- **Decolonise the Pan-Amazon region:** Reframe the Pan-Amazon from a place of resources to be extracted into lived territories. Historically, national governments have treated the region as a colonial space—prioritising extraction while neglecting state presence and the safeguarding of rights—leaving communities and small towns vulnerable to both climate and security threats. Decolonising the Amazon means centring Indigenous and traditional communities in decision-making, securing land and territorial rights, investing in public services and the rule of law, and incentivising sustainable economies.
- **Increase regional and cross-regional cooperation:** Existing initiatives demonstrate that, even in an increasingly polarised world, LAC continues to bet on multilateralism to tackle climate security challenges. Deepening existing forms of cooperation and exploring additional regional and cross-regional partnerships will contribute to increasing resilience to climate risks, tackling security issues and combating environmental crime along supply chains.
- **Expand the presence of state institutions:** Extend permanent state services and rule of law into remote and frontier areas so communities can access health, education and social protection services, and so criminal organisations face real deterrence. This means strengthening region-specific security infrastructure, for example fast boats for pursuing offenders in the Amazon, as well as investing in intelligence-led operations to compensate for physical constraints.
- **Create sustainable livelihood alternatives:** Expanding sustainable income opportunities can make environmental preservation financially attractive and reduce the appeal of maladaptive practices. Priorities should include supporting bioeconomy value chains that cause no deforestation in their production, integrate different knowledge systems and move away from commodity dependence.

For international stakeholders:

- **Recognise environmental crimes as serious crimes:** Although environmental crimes are increasingly detrimental to the environment, governance and human security, this type of criminal activity is not yet considered a serious crime under the Palermo Convention. Changing this classification will allow states to use the instruments and methods of the Convention to combat them more effectively.
- **Hold multinational corporations accountable:** Increase accountability for corporations whose operations or supply chains drive land degradation, environmental crime and land grabbing.

For donors:

- **Make LAC an investment priority:** LAC remains an underfunded region for CPS donors. Position the LAC region as a priority destination for climate security finance, matching the region's risks, vulnerability and relevance of its ecosystems for local and global climate.
- **Move away from projectised funding:** The short-term nature, low grant values and high bureaucracy of project funding make it unsuitable for the large-scale, coordinated action needed at the climate security nexus in LAC. Prioritise longer-term, ambitious interventions that have state buy-in. The Amazon Fund is an example of a long-term mechanism with national ownership from its creation, and the Tropical Forest Forever Facility appears promising as a long-term alternative finance instrument.
- **Increase direct funding to Indigenous communities:** Channel flexible, risk-tolerant finance directly to Indigenous organisations for environmental protection and increased resilience, recognising their role as frontline defenders and the carbon sink function of their lands. Invest in long-term action where communities are implementers, not only beneficiaries.

Next steps

The consecutive CBD and UNFCCC COPs in Colombia and Brazil have brought LAC's climate, environment and peacebuilding challenges and solutions to the centre of global climate and biodiversity discussions. To sustain momentum beyond UNFCCC's COP30, the recommendations in this practical note should be advanced at national, regional and cross-regional levels. Stakeholders should accelerate action through coordinated implementation on the ground, adequate finance and robust accountability mechanisms. Governments, funders, practitioners and civil society organisations should carry these proposals into upcoming multilateral processes, further strengthening LAC's leadership and delivering concrete results for climate and environmental resilience, human security and peace across the region.



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