

## NATIONAL – REGIONAL

### *C) IIRSA project*

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A worldwide boom in commodity markets has stimulated production in the sectors of mining, timber, agriculture and cattle. However, excessive transportation costs hamper access to international markets and reduce competitiveness. This has strongly increased the need of investment in transportation facilities to link agricultural areas and mining facilities with harbours and industrial plants located at great distances. New mega-infrastructure projects have been started or are being planned with investment coming from foreign private firms, investment banks, governments and donors.

Since 2000 the Latin American governments have implemented the Initiative for Regional Infrastructure Integration in South America (IIRSA). The Initiative is a unique approach as it involves a package of integrated long-term planning among national governments and development banks according to a consensus agenda. Strategic environmental assessments (SEA) and related Action Plans are a prerequisite for loans to be provided by regional development banks. IIRSA was started by twelve countries and three regional development banks. The programme focuses on the development of ten development corridors (*ejes de desarrollo*). By now investment proposals in the consensus agenda involve investment up to US\$ 68 billion, particularly in the development of road infrastructure and the improvement of the navigability of rivers.

These corridors contribute to the creation of new socio-economic and environmental landscapes in Latin America. They may stimulate migration and the rise of new communities as well as the destruction of traditional systems, the spread of diseases like HIV-Aids and the spread of violence and lawlessness. Moreover, roads are among the main causes of deforestation in the tropics. Strategic environmental assessments (SEA), GIS analysis and related statistical studies indicate indirect impact areas of such infrastructural works in forested and savannah regions to be very wide, involving substantial parts of national territories, and contributing to a large-scale and irreversible transformation of the landscape. Hence, improvement of trade-related road infrastructure not only is a major tool to stimulate overall economic growth in Latin America but is, at the same time, a major cause of deforestation, threatening biodiversity, habitat for local people, water management at the regional level, and the provision of public goods like carbon sequestration and climate stabilisation at the global level.

This research programme aims at improving the understanding of the interaction between the development of trade-related infrastructure and sustainable forest management by bringing together theoretical and statistical insights and results from case studies. A volume dealing with the methodology of strategic environmental assessment studies is being prepared by a team of researchers. The study is coordinated and edited by Pitou van Dijck, in cooperation with Bert van Barneveld, director DHV South America. The research programme will include specific analyses of the impact of road infrastructure programmes in the border zone of, broadly defined, Bolivia, Peru and Brazil, the so-called MAP area; in the Guyanas, and in the Brazilian Amazonia. Part of the programme will be a three-year research programme (September 2008-2011), co-financed by Cordaid, Icco and Novib-Oxfam, while more funding proposals are being drafted for additional case studies focusing on similar dimensions of the IIRSA Initiative.