

Next Stage 1 課題文

Since the 1970s one of the primary symbols of our global impacts is what is happening to the world's rainforests. These forests regions, on around ten per cent of the world's land surface, play a crucial role in safeguarding the viability of the global environment. They discharge vast amounts of moisture into the atmosphere, helping to regulate climatic conditions all over the world. They are also a genetic treasure trove and an intricate web of living organisms, many of which live nowhere else. The largest remaining areas of rainforest can be found in Central Africa, South East Asia and, of course, the Amazon.

South America's Amazon region extends to an area the size of western Europe, divided between eight countries. Brazil has by far the largest chunk of rainforest of any country in the world. But ever since the 1960s it has sought to develop this 'dormant asset', turning the habitat of a vast variety of plant and animal species into a place for people to extract resources from. As a consequence, the future of the forests, and also that of the indigenous people who live here, is threatened – not only by gold and mineral mining, but also by logging and cattle ranching.

Deep in the Amazon forest, tribal people such as the Yanomami still live by the codes of their old-established cultures, in self-supporting villages of around 100 people. The honey and forest fruit and nuts they collect, the fish they catch, the birds and mammals they hunt, and the manioc, bananas and the other fruit they grow provide them with a perfectly adequate living. They consume as much as they need for their physical sustenance and no more. They don't demand much else from their environment. Davi Kopenawa, a Yanomami who has learned Portuguese, speaks for the 120 or so communities dotted around the forest:

"We take care of our land. We need to preserve it and that's why we don't use too much. Nature is life, our life. It gives us food for the people, for all of us. Without land there is no nature. And without nature there's no life."

But nowadays the Yanomami are no strangers to impacts from outside. Loggers and gold miners have invaded their reservation, bringing with them new diseases and damaging their forests. Their situation is shared by hundreds of tribes of South American Indians. They have all been affected by the commercial exploitation of the region's natural wealth on behalf of the rest of us.

The Yanomami have an additional grievance. It's against Brazilian law to take gold from Indian territories, but the gold miners keep coming back, time and time again. Brazil's federal police estimate that, at any one time, up to 20,000 people have been mining gold in the Yanomami reservation. The financial rewards from selling the gold far outweigh the risks. When the Yanomami try to intercede, they risk injury or even death at the hands of the miners. Dozens have been killed trying to protect their land. Many others have died from infectious diseases brought in by the miners. Across the Amazon, millions of Indians have died as their land was taken from them, or they have come in contact with new diseases against which they don't have resistance or traditional remedies. Today it is becoming clear that responsibility for such genocide and such environmental impacts is no longer someone else's problem. What happens in the Amazon rain forests, or the rainforests of Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Malaysia or Central Africa, ultimately concerns all of us, because it is ultimately done on our behalf.