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## On Amazon destruction, will Brazil President Lula's 'disinformation space' be penetrated? (commentary)



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Marina Silva, who struggles heroically for the environment as minister of environment and climate change, apparently has little voice on matters wider than the strict purview of her ministry, especially enforcing existing environmental regulations such as those prohibiting unauthorized deforestation. She has, for example, [declined to take a position](#) on energy policy on the grounds that authority for this rests with other parts of the government. On

the BR-319 highway and the mouth-of-the-Amazon oil plan she has made clear that her ministry's role is limited to technical rulings on whether licensing protocols have been followed; although in both cases the licensing covers a larger geographical areas than does the licensing for most projects, the decisions do not involve a judgement on overarching issues such as the implications of these projects for climate change (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

The minister of science, technology and innovation, Luciana Santos, should at least theoretically have a voice in these matters. As a representative of Brazil's scientific community, she has a certain responsibility to represent that community's conclusions on important issues facing Brazil. I can testify that a massive majority of Brazil's scientific community is opposed to the three projects mentioned above, in addition to various other government projects that imply destruction in Amazonia in the name of supposed development (see [here](#) and [here](#)). A key question, therefore, is what the minister of science, technology and innovation is telling President Lula.



President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva hugs Minister of Environment Marina Silva during a panel discussion on forests at the COP28 climate summit in Dubai. Image courtesy of Ricardo Stuckert/Agência Brasil.

Compared to the ministers who form President Lula's disinformation space, the minister of science, technology and innovation has relatively little access to the president's ear.

However, she has just had a golden opportunity: a trip to Moscow and Beijing with Lula in the presidential airplane.

While the minister's trip was underway, I had the rare opportunity to speak with her interim replacement during a ceremonial event of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences. When I asked what the minister tells President Lula about the three disastrous projects mentioned above, the answer was that these are "complex issues" and the minister is "very concerned" with sustainable development, revealing in just a few words that the minister is not telling President Lula what he needs to know.

Unfortunately, the government projects in question cannot be turned into "sustainable development" by implanting governance measures (e.g., see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). The relevant question is one of "yes" or "no" — that is, should these projects go forward or not — and dodging it indicates that there is no sign that President Lula's disinformation space will be penetrated.

*This article is an updated translation of a text by the author that is available in Portuguese on [Amazônia Real](#).*

**Banner image:** Drone view of flooded forest in the Amazon. Photo by Rhett A. Butler for Mongabay.

**See a related commentary by this writer:**

**Citations:**

Fearnside, P. M. (2022). Amazon environmental services: Why Brazil's Highway BR-319 is so damaging. *Ambio*, 51(6), 1367-1370. doi:[10.1007/s13280-022-01718-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-022-01718-y)

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