



BRAZIL: AMAZON

Annual report 2025-2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, the Freedom Fund's Amazon Hotspot operated in a complex and volatile environment marked by heightened risks of deforestation and slave labour. Although deforestation declined compared to previous peaks, the Brazilian Amazon nevertheless lost nearly 5,800 square kilometres of forest during the year. The 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (COP30), which took place in Belém, Brazil, did not achieve the significant outcomes in official negotiations but showed strong mobilisation of civil society and social movements. Political developments further complicated anti-slavery efforts, including interference with Brazil's "Dirty List," delays in national policy frameworks and the approval of a new environmental licensing law that may weaken safeguards and enable exploitative projects. At the same time, rising public awareness was reflected in record numbers of reports and rescues of workers who were in conditions analogous to slavery.¹

The portfolio of Freedom Fund partners continues to address both immediate protection needs of communities and the structural drivers of exploitation. Two new partners joined the hotspot in late 2025 to strengthen international advocacy in supply chains and participatory community-based grant-making that shifts power and decisions to affected communities.

Strategic campaigns in regions impacted by slave labour-driven deforestation and mobilisations during the "People's COP" in Belém, which convened more than 12,000 participants and 100 organisations, engaged tens of thousands of people. Training initiatives built capacity among approximately 20,000 community members and 2,700 public servants to identify and respond to slave labour.

Significant progress was made in strengthening collaboration among government agencies, civil society and communities. Partners facilitated coordination between environmental bodies, law-enforcement agencies and labour authorities, supported the integration of anti-slavery measures into municipal planning and social protection systems, and improved referral pathways for survivors.



The hotspot also advanced accountability in supply chains linked to deforestation and exploitation. Investigative research exposed connections between slave labour and major global brands. Judicial decisions requiring disclosure of cattle movement data improved transparency, while advocacy contributed to national and state anti-slavery plans. However, enforcement remained uneven, with civil society often acting to defend existing mechanisms against political setbacks.

Overall, progress during the year demonstrated that coordinated civil society action can deliver tangible protection for vulnerable populations while influencing systems that sustain modern slavery. Despite significant challenges, this hotspot strengthened institutional capacity, empowered communities and increased scrutiny of high-risk supply chains, laying critical groundwork for long-term reduction of slave labour associated with deforestation.

OPERATING CONTEXT

In 2025, an area of 5,796 square kilometres was deforested in the Brazilian Amazon.² The operating environment remained highly volatile. Expansion of agribusiness, infrastructure projects, illegal mining and land grabbing intensified, increasing risks of slave labour. COP30 took place in Belém do Pará but official negotiations didn't achieve significant outcomes despite strong civil society engagement at the conference's parallel spaces.

Reports of slavery-like conditions to the national hotline increased 14% and a record 4,516 reports were registered. The government considered this a sign that the population is more aware and thereby reporting more.³ Authorities rescued 2,772 workers from slavery-like conditions, a significant increase from 2024.⁴ However, political interference in labour enforcement became a major concern. A controversial ministerial decision removed companies from Brazil's "Dirty List" of employers that use slave labour, prompting resignations by labour inspectors and suspension of inspections. This was the worst blow in anti-slavery policies since the creation of the list.⁵

The approval of Brazil's new General Environmental Licensing Law represented a major setback. The legislation risks accelerating deforestation-driven projects without adequate scrutiny.⁶ In areas where land grabbing, illegal logging, mining and large-scale agriculture frequently rely on precarious and coercive labour practices, reduced oversight increases the likelihood that slave labour will go undetected.

Supply chains linked to cattle in the Amazon were exposed for being connected with slave labour and deforestation cases. News stories and reports exposed sports and fashion brands' connections to such cases via their leather supply chains, U.S. airliners' connections to Amazon deforestation via their biofuel supply chains (which use tallow from Brazilian cattle), connections of meat and tallow supply chains in the U.S. to slave labour in the Amazon, and connections of luxury fashion brands like Coach, Chanel, Fendi and Louis Vuitton, via leather, to Amazon deforestation cases. The investigations showed that current practices on human rights and environmental due diligence are flawed.⁷

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There were delays and frustration with the lack of approval of the third National Plan to Eradicate Slave Labor, a policy that will integrate deforestation and supply chain responsibility into combating slavery, and of the National Policy on Business and Human Rights that would provide a framework for corporate accountability and due diligence in supply chains. International factors also affected the context. Trade tensions and foreign tariffs put additional pressure on supply chains to reduce costs, which increases the risk for deforestation and slave labour in the meat-cattle supply chain. However, there were also positive developments. Judicial decisions required disclosure of cattle movement data in Pará, improving transparency for supply-chain monitoring. A landmark judicial decision also held a global company accountable for slave labour at its agricultural operations in the Brazilian Amazon and set the largest compensation in Brazil for modern slavery.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The hotspot portfolio of partners combines frontline presence in remote territories with national and international-level influence on policy and supply chains through eight civil society organisations:

- Three national anti-slavery and human rights partners are working to strengthen laws and policies and increase transparency and accountability in supply chains, as well as to improve government's capacity to address the issue.
- Three local grassroots partners based in critical hotspot areas on the frontlines of slavery-driven deforestation are engaging with local governments to improve local structures and responses, and are working directly with the most affected communities to raise awareness, increase their capacity to organise, protect their rights, strengthen monitoring networks, make reports, collaborate with authorities and take collective action against exploitative practices.
- A traditional Amazonian community fund was selected to provide micro grants to community-based organisations (CBOs) through a participatory grant-making approach that shifts power and decisions to those closest to the challenges and solutions.
- An international partner collaborates with local partners to expose global supply chain connections to slave labour and deforestation in the Amazon.



Illustration for the Freedom Fund by Tai Silva

More than 600 community group members supported

Through the community-level work of our partners the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), Reta and Movimento Xingu Vivo, 15 groups against slave labour and for environmental protection in local traditional communities were supported to monitor their territories against deforestation, slave labour, child sexual exploitation and related threats.

24 fashion and athletic brands and 8 meat packing businesses exposed

Our partners Reporter Brasil and Climate Rights collaborated on two reports exposing major brands and how their supply chains are connected to slave labour and deforestation cases in the Amazon.

2,700 public servants trained to address slave labour

Reporter Brasil and Instituto Trabalho Decente (ITD), both of whom are partners working to influence systemic change in Brazil, provided comprehensive training for federal and state public servants to identify and respond to slave labour cases.

20,000 people protected from slave labour through training and information

Over the year, more than 20,000 individuals in vulnerable communities, especially young people, were protected from slave labour through training and information in schools and communities provided by Reporter Brasil, through the Slavery No Way methodology, and our hotspot partners.

More than 12,000 people mobilised during the UN Climate Summit

CPT co-organised The People's COP, a grassroots movement from Amazon-based organisations, which hosted one of the main parallel spaces at COP30 in Belem. It gathered social movements, NGOs, communities and specialists from Brazil and beyond. Over two weeks, 12,000 participants and 100 organisations joined 132 side events.

25,000 reached via campaigns in the frontlines of deforestation

A billboard placed strategically between the towns of São Felix do Xingu and Tucumã in Pará, the key hotspot area of cattle and slave labour, became the talk of the towns.

Hotspot Objective 1: To increase capacity and collaboration among public agents, CSOs and Amazonian communities to address slave labour associated with deforestation

As part of our work under this objective, the Freedom Fund is focusing on collaborations among key stakeholders, on community prevention and on ensuring that survivors have meaningful assistance.

Partners operated across local, state, and national levels to strengthen anti-slavery systems in Brazil by combining policy influence, institutional coordination and community-based action. ITD and Reporter Brasil played a key role in shaping and advancing the National Plan to Eradicate Slave Labour, while CPT contributed to state-level policy in Pará. ITD also enabled new collaboration among environmental agencies, law enforcement and labour inspectors, improving the identification of slave labour in deforestation contexts and fostering more coordinated responses beyond Brasília. In Amazonas, RETA integrated anti-slavery efforts into municipal systems by training frontline health and social workers and influencing local planning to address vulnerabilities linked to deforestation and labour exploitation. At the grassroots level, partners strengthened early warning, reporting and protection mechanisms. Movimento Xingu Vivo, RETA and CPT strengthened community protection by connecting affected communities with authorities, improving local monitoring and helping workers and communities organise, identify, report and respond to slave labour and other human rights abuses and environmental crimes, as well as defend their rights.

At the same time, partners worked closely with government institutions to improve survivor protection, access to justice and post-rescue support. In Amazonas, with ITD's support, authorities committed to implementing a State Commission to coordinate prevention, assistance and policy responses across key sectors. RETA further strengthened municipal capacity by embedding anti-slavery measures into public services, while CPT expanded outreach in rural areas, supporting survivors directly and enabling communities to report abuses. Partners also advanced strategic litigation at national and international levels, contributing to UN mechanisms on modern slavery, human rights and climate change. Efforts to protect human rights defenders were also reinforced, with initiatives such as Movimento Xingu Vivo's

engagement helping advance plans for a regional protection hub in Altamira, strengthening safeguards for those confronting labour exploitation and related risks.

The People's COP: a counter-forum to amplify voices of people living the real impact of the climate and slave labour crisis. The 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (COP30), hosted in Belém, was expected to be a landmark climate summit. It aimed to align global climate action with forest protection, human rights and a just transition. While expectations were high, official negotiations failed to make progress on key issues such as ending deforestation and advancing climate finance at scale. The lack of a structured approach by key stakeholders on addressing the connections between slave labour and climate change remained.



Illustration displayed during COP

By foregrounding lived experiences of frontline populations and strengthening networks among organisations working on socio-environmental and labour rights issues, the COP do Povo contributed to building a shared agenda that links anti-slavery efforts with climate action and territorial defence. People's COP participants also joined the People's Summit for the Global Climate March, a major protest with more than 70,000 participants from diverse communities, unions, and activists demanding immediate climate action and climate justice.⁸

A billboard installed in Tucumã by CPT as part of an anti-slavery awareness campaign



Another important initiative of the People's COP was the People's Tribunal against Ecogenocide, a symbolic and autonomous court organised by social movements that have denounced socio-environmental crimes and human rights violations. The jury was composed of "guardians of the territories" and their allies. More than 411 people attended the two-day tribunal where 21 cases from eight countries were presented – including slave labour, illegal mining, killing of defenders, deforestation, contamination, land grabbing and forced displacement. According to the tribunal, the world is experiencing "a war between ways of life" – the colonial model that expropriates bodies and territories, and the ancestral way that recognises the Earth as "alive, diverse, Mother, and worthy of respect." Based on testimonial and documentary evidence and expert opinions, the "sentence" handed down by the tribunal demanded reparations from governments, finance institutions and 800 companies complicit with human rights violations and environmental destruction in the Amazon, as well as the commodification of nature globally.

Shifting narratives in frontlines of cattle-driven deforestation. The "Keep an Eye to Not Become Enslaved" campaign was created by CPT in 1997 to address slave labour in Brazil. In 27 years of campaigning, it has received more than 1,600 reports. In 2025, as part of the local actions of the campaign, CPT installed two billboards in municipalities in the forefront of slavery, deforestation and cattle expansion in the Amazon. One was placed in São Felix do Xingu and the other between Ourilândia do Norte and Tucumã. These three neighbouring areas together are home to the largest number of cattle in Brazil. São Felix do Xingu is also where the largest number of workers have been rescued from slave labour and it ranks second in deforestation. The billboards spread the message that slave labour continues to exist, warned workers to open their eyes and provided information on hotlines and support services.

With an estimated 31% prevalence of slave labour among cattle ranching workers, the billboards are powerful tools to bring the problem out of the shadows. Beyond the public service announcement, the billboards sparked debate, local Facebook profiles filled with comments both favourable and against. Most of the criticism focused on "tainting the local reputation" or dismissing slave labour as "just hard work," while favourable comments pointed out the "need to address the issue" or "to make the problem visible." With precious little space available for public discussion about human rights in an area dominated by agribusiness and cattle ranching, the billboards were successful in shifting the terms of the debate.

Hotspot Objective 2: Curbing commercialisation of products derived from slave labour in supply chains of timber and livestock in the Amazon

Advancing transparency in opaque supply chains – especially in the cattle sector – remained a central priority in 2025, with important progress driven by sustained civil society advocacy. A major breakthrough came when the Pará state agricultural agency released detailed cattle movement data following a federal court decision, improving the ability to trace supply chains and identify links to deforestation and slave labour, even if the data remain incomplete. Investigations led by organisations such as Reporter Brasil also exposed connections between financial institutions and companies involved in labour abuses, increasing reputational pressure and prompting

corrective actions. These efforts contributed to both enforcement responses and agreements requiring companies to compensate those impacted and improve practices.

At the same time, significant challenges persist. Political interference in the “Dirty List” of employers using slave labour weakened a key accountability mechanism and led to a temporary suspension of inspections, thereby allowing abuses to continue. In response, civil society organisations mobilised to defend this and other tools and maintain pressure for enforcement through coordinated advocacy. Overall, while progress toward corporate accountability remains uneven, it is increasingly driven by strategic investigations, public exposure and collective action.



Illustration from front cover of Before it's too late report

Before It's Too Late: Curbing Cattle-Driven Deforestation and Rights Abuses in Brazil. Climate Rights International, in collaboration with Reporter Brasil, published a report in October 2025 examining the role of human rights abuses in fuelling cattle-driven deforestation in Brazil and exposing sports apparel and fashion brands' connections to these abuses through their leather supply chain. The report identified 24 major brands. It also explains why efforts by beef and leather companies to eliminate these harms from their supply chains have been inadequate, and why their promises to do better remain unconvincing. And it outlines how the Brazilian government could both facilitate and compel more effective due diligence – and more sustainable production – throughout the cattle sector.

Today, Brazil has the tools it needs to make its cattle supply chains more transparent and sustainable. Government officials and industry leaders must choose whether to deploy them effectively – or to continue to allow abusive and unsustainable practices within the cattle sector to push the country further down the path toward ecological disaster. The report calls for a national compliance monitoring platform, traceability systems and a unified national traceability and monitoring mechanism, as well as for mandatory human rights due diligence legislation. It also urges fashion and footwear brands to do their part to clean up their supply chains.

Strengthening of civil society organisations and movements

The hotspot community of practice has significantly strengthened collaboration among partner organisations. New partners, Conectas and Fundo Dema, have joined the group, contributing to national and international advocacy and expanding community prevention. In addition to regular meetings, there were partner exchanges through workshops, trainings and organic collaborations in the field, especially focused on preventing slave labour. The hotspot program also invested in partners' institutional development priorities – such as fundraising, campaigns, digital security and financial management – with special attention to the protection of human rights defenders, given the high risk they face in the Amazon. The group also reflected on strategic collective priorities through meetings with experts, addressing topics such as the impacts of tariffs on deforestation and slave labour, the Amazon's dependence on the commodity economy, the challenges in criminal accountability for slave labour and the risks associated with the carbon credit market for the vulnerability of communities to slave labour. Further, there was strong preparation for COP30 through alliances analysing government proposals such as the Tropical Forest Forever Facility and actively participating in parallel forums like the People's Summit, which brought together Brazilian and international civil society for a multi-day forum. Partners also contributed the People's Tribunal against Ecogenocide, gathering evidence for the cases, reinforcing the collective role of advocacy and making injustices visible.

CASE STUDY

The story of “Cachimbo” returning home

Salomão Rodrigues Feitosa, known as “Cachimbo” (or Old Pipe), is a survivor of slave labour in São Félix do Xingu. He has spent his life as an itinerant farm labourer, without documentation, birth registration or access to social protection – conditions that typically make workers extremely vulnerable to slave labour in the Amazon. Despite being elderly, in poor health and eligible for retirement, he remained excluded from basic services and citizenship rights. After being found living in precarious conditions in the Terra Roxa community, residents referred him to Freedom Fund partner Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), which began a long-term accompaniment process involving trust-building and coordination with local institutions.

CPT mobilised a network including the rural workers’ union (STTR), the Municipal Social Assistance Secretariat and the local anti-slavery network to secure documentation, healthcare and social benefits for Salomão. Initially housed at the union headquarters, he faced inadequate living conditions, insufficient medical care and worsening diabetes. CPT attempted to place him in an elder care facility, but capacity constraints and administrative barriers prevented admission. While waiting for a judicial decision on his documentation, social services agreed to provide food and daily health monitoring; however, these commitments were only partially fulfilled, leading to further health crises and hospitalisation.

As the situation became unsustainable, CPT coordinated meetings among service providers and pursued formal complaints with the Public Prosecutor’s Office. Once a court ruling authorised the issuance of his birth certificate, CPT accompanied Salomão through the process of obtaining official documents – an essential step toward accessing the Continuous Cash Benefit (BPC). When institutional solutions failed, CPT and the network traced family members and negotiated an alternative arrangement. A nephew eventually agreed to receive him, and within days the Social Assistance Secretariat arranged transport to Floresta do Araguaia. Shortly thereafter, his documentation was regularised and he gained access to the benefit.



According to family members, Salomão’s health improved significantly after reunification, and he is now living in stable conditions with relatives who are able to support him. Beyond the individual outcome, the case demonstrates how coordinated civil society action can overcome bureaucratic barriers that often trap vulnerable workers in situations of abandonment and exploitation risk. By securing identity documents, social protection and family reintegration, CPT not only ended Salomão’s extreme vulnerability but also addressed structural factors – lack of documentation, institutional fragmentation and social isolation – that contribute to modern slavery in rural Amazon.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The terms “slave labour” and “work analogous to slavery” are used in Brazil to designate the situation in which the person is subjected to forced labour, exhausting hours, debt servitude and/or degrading conditions. It is considered a crime under Article 149 of the Penal Code.
- 2 Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais (INPE). “TerraBrasilis: Legal Amazon Biome—Deforestation Rates Dashboard.” TerraBrasilis. Accessed February 12, 2026. Available at: https://terrabilis.dpi.inpe.br/app/dashboard/deforestation/biomes/legal_amazon/rates
- 3 Ministério dos direitos Humanos e Cidadania. “Disque 100 registrou o maior número de denúncias da história em 2025”. January 28, 2026. Accessed 12th of March 2026. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2026/janeiro/disque-100-registrou-o-maior-numero-de-denuncias-de-trabalho-escravo-da-historia-em-2025>
- 4 Barros, Carlos Juliano. “Brasil flagra mais de 1,6 mil escravizados em 2024.” Repórter Brasil (blog), 3d January 2026. <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2025/01/brasil-flagra-mais-de-16-mil-escravizados-em-2024-do-rock-in-rio-a-byd/>
- 5 Bataier, C. , Stropasolas, P. “Após interferir no caso JBS, chefia do MTE livra da Lista Suja do trabalho escravo empresa que algeinou trabalhador na Bahia”. Brasil de Fato, 2025, October 8th. Accessed February 13th. <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2025/10/08/apos-interferir-no-caso-jbs-chefia-do-mte-livra-da-lista-suja-do-trabalho-escravo-empresa-que-algeinou-trabalhador-quilombola-na-bahia/>
- 6 Braga de Souza, Oswaldo. “Congresso liquida de vez o licenciamento e consolida retrocesso ambiental histórico”. December 4th, 2025. <https://www.socioambiental.org/noticias-socioambientais/congresso-liquida-de-vez-licenciamento-e-consolida-retrocesso-ambiental>
- 7 Reporter Brasil report: “Casos de Trabalho Escravo expõe fragilidades no mercado de créditos de Carbono”. Available at: <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2024/02/caso-de-trabalho-escravo-expoe-fragilidades-do-mercado-de-creditos-de-carbono/>
- Climate Rights International report: “Brazil: Cattle Ranching, Forced Labor Driving Deforestation Ahead of COP30”. October 9th, 2025. <https://cri.org/brazil-cattle-ranching-forced-labor-driving-deforestation-ahead-cop30/>
- Reuters report: “How a Texas refinery turns Amazon-destroying cattle into green fuel”. November 14th 2025. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/how-texas-refinery-turns-amazon-destroying-cattle-into-green-jet-fuel-2025-09-16/>
- Corporate Accountability Lab report: “Bullsh*t: Forced Labor in Brazil’s Beef and Tallow Supply Chain”. July 24th, 2025. Available at: <https://corpaccountabilitylab.org/bullsh-t-forced-labor-in-brazils-beef-and-tallow-supply-chains>
- 8 Agência Brasil. “Over 70,000 march for the climate on the streets of Belém”. November 16th, 2025. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/meio-ambiente/noticia/2025-11/over-70000-march-climate-streets-belem>

VISION

Our vision is a world
free of slavery.

MISSION

We invest in frontline organisations
and movements to drive a measurable
reduction of modern slavery in high-
prevalence countries and industries.

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