PART V

POLITICAL PARTNERSHIPS
Until the 1980s, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon had been largely the result of public interventions, such as fiscal incentives for the creation of large cattle ranches and investments in dams, roads and railroads. In the 1970s and 1980s, the new infrastructure opened up formerly closed areas of lowland forests, facilitated planned colonisation and stimulated spontaneous migration towards the region (Mahar 1988; Browder 1988). The result was a dramatic increase in both urban and rural population, and the disappearance of 10 per cent of the original forest cover.

Since the 1990s, with basic infrastructure installed and cattle ranching rendered profitable due to innovations, deforestation has been based on endogenous dynamics which occur independently of public investments. In the meantime, civil society organisations mushroomed in the Amazon, often with support from foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Today, they are important partners for sustainable, bottom-up development strategies. They are now focusing their attention on new federal investments in infrastructure in the heartland of the Amazon rain forest, as became evident in the broad political mobilisation of social movements and NGOs against two large public infrastructure investment projects: the hydroelectric plant in Belo Monte, nearby Altamira, at the conjunction of the Transamazônica and the Xingu river and the paving of the federal road BR-163 between Santarém and Cuiabá. This chapter explores how