

## CHAPTER 5

### Social Landscapes



Round village of Kayapo Indigenous People. The Amazon is home to hundreds of traditional communities, including the Kayapo, who successfully maintained their cultural traditions (©Russell A. Mittermeier/ CI).

People who live in the Amazon's rural areas are among the poorest inhabitants of the continent,<sup>74</sup> with some of the highest rates of illiteracy and worst health conditions in Latin America (IBGE, 2006). The region's poverty is partially the result of its geographic isolation. IIRSA investments in transportation infrastructure will greatly reduce this isolation and will undoubtedly promote economic growth and create new businesses opportunities and jobs—all of which will increase tax revenues and improve public services. Not surprisingly, most policymakers and the average citizen assume that the social impacts of IIRSA will be overwhelmingly positive. However, a more careful evaluation reveals that the distribution of these social effects will not benefit many of the region's current residents. Moreover, the relatively rapid introduction of economic and social change will generate a range of negative impacts in rural communities, including indigenous societies.

<sup>74</sup> We make this statement with a caveat: indicators based on income are not wholly indicative of well-being and must be interpreted carefully. Because most rural Amazonian economies have limited access to wage labor and rely on subsistence activities to provide life's necessities, lower incomes are to be expected.