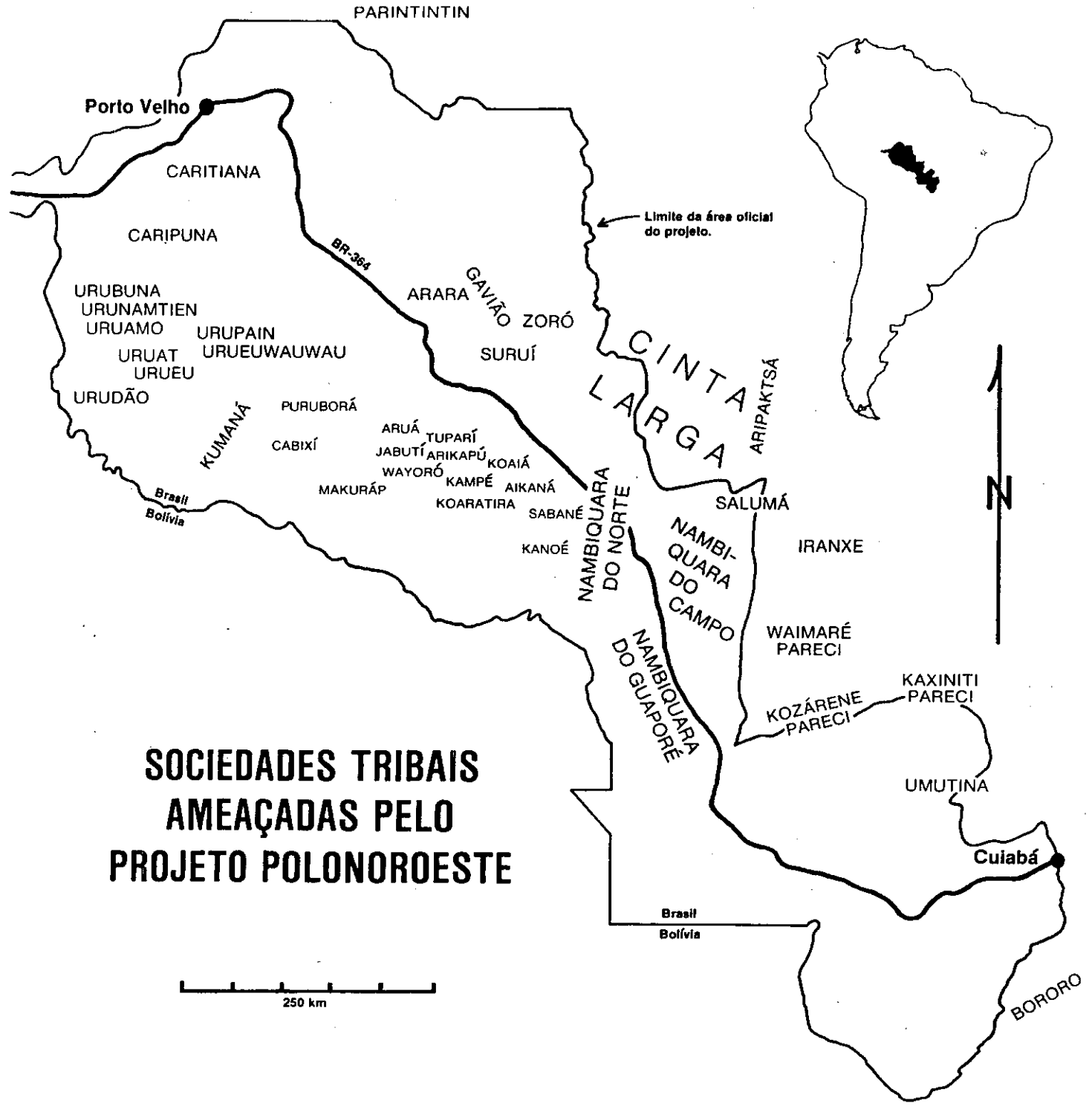


The Impact of Project Polonoroeste on Native Peoples

The Programa Integrado de Desenvolvimento do Noroeste do Brasil (Polonoroeste) is a project to develop the region between Cuiabá and Porto Velho. It is the result of collaboration between SUDECO (Ministry of the Interior), GEIPOT (Ministry of Transportation) and INCRA (Ministry of Agriculture). The target area includes all of Rondônia and in Mato Grosso the municípios of Barra do Bugre, Cáceres, Mirassol d'Oeste, Livramento, Poconé, Tangará da Serra, Várzea Grande, Vila Bela and the part of Aripuanã to the west of the rio Roosevelt. The area of this region is 41 million hectares, of which 25 million are considered suitable for agriculture. In the next five years, an asphalt road is to be built between Cuiabá and Porto Velho, a network of lateral roads will link all parts of the region, systematic colonization will be undertaken, collection points for agricultural produce will be established and technical assistance will be furnished for agricultural development. This will cost more than one and one quarter billion dollars, of which Brazil hopes to borrow one third from the World Bank.

Project Polonoroeste was drawn up as if the area were uninhabited, although much of it belongs to tribal societies who were living there before Pedro Alvares Cabral set foot in Porto Seguro. These tiny societies are completely defenseless against a nation of 125 million people. Vigorous action must be taken to protect them from the impact of rapid development. When Project Polonoroeste is implemented, land values will soar. Before this happens, adequate reservations must be delimited, decreed and demarcated. Adequacy should be determined in accordance with the assumption that tribal peoples will continue to live in their own way, and not on the premise that they can be coerced into adopting the values of an alien society. There will also be a heavy influx of settlers bringing diseases which are unknown to the natives, and which they have no ability to treat. Brazil must compensate for this threat to their survival with a comprehensive medical program. If the tribal people are granted no greater rights than the beasts of the forest, Brazil will not escape charges of racist discrimination.

Since the World Bank does not wish to be seen as an accessory to genocide, it has required that Brazil make adequate provisions for the native peoples before it grants the loan. But the guardianship of Brazil's tribal minorities is consigned to the Funai, an organization which does not inspire confidence. It has infected native peoples with fatal diseases during their "pacification," and it has been unable to protect their lands from invasion by ranchers and colonists. It is run by a bunch of colonels who neither understand nor care for the people they are supposed to assist, while more than 50 of the most committed indigenists and technicians have been purged. Unless the World Bank is completely cynical, it will not entrust the Funai with the welfare of the natives affected by Project Polonoroeste.



SOCIEDADES TRIBAIS AMEAÇADAS PELO PROJETO POLONOROESTE

250 km