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Thinking Politically About
Sustainable Development
in Latin American Rainforests

Eduardo Silva

**THINKING POLITICALLY ABOUT
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN
AMERICAN RAINFORESTS**

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THINKING POLITICALLY ABOUT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICAN RAINFORESTS

Most of the literature on tropical deforestation concentrates on identifying its causes and then advocates policy prescriptions to halt the destruction. Unfortunately, governments often ignore these well-meaning proposals, which raises the following question. Under what conditions do states adopt policies that promote the sustainable development of Latin American rainforests? This paper will examine how international and domestic factors shape the public policy of sustainable development, with an emphasis on grassroots development. Specifically it will compare the political conditions which established extractive reserves in Brazil, community forestry programs in Mexico and Peru, and agroforestry in Peru.

The development studies field posits a strong relationship between economic development, poverty, and the environment. Many studies argue that poor economic performance increases poverty, which, in turn, aggravates environmental degradation (World Bank, 1992; Inter-American Development Bank, 1991; Brundtland Commission, 1987). Some studies maintain that this vicious circle can be broken and made to give way to virtuous cycles, although most tend to emphasize national economic development models (Ascher and Healy, 1990). They assume that aggregate economic growth will improve national income, and that rising income levels, in turn, will allow people to become concerned about environmental degradation. This paper contends that vicious cycles can be turned into virtuous cycles at the community or grassroots level too. Indeed, the people directly affected will probably be better off if they are participants and agents of change rather than the passive recipients of central government plans.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE POLICY CONSEQUENCES OF CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

The well-documented effects of poverty on environmental degradation gave birth to the concept sustainable development—first popularized by the Brundtland Commission report (1987). The report stressed the search for a style of economic development capable of meeting the basic needs of a developing country's population, while maintaining its stock of natural resources so as not to rob future generations of their use (Global Tomorrow Coalition, 1989). In short, economic development must not be at the expense of the environmental quality of future generations.

For policy and programmatic purposes, development economists, principally in multilateral lending institutions and international organizations, broke the concept down into three interrelated components: a healthy growing economy (which may necessitate structural adjustment), a commitment to social equity (or meeting basic needs), and protection of the environment (Weaver and O'Keefe, 1991).¹ This definition raises two immediate difficulties. First, the terms are too general. This means that careful attention must be paid to their specific content because that will heavily color policy prescriptions. Second, fulfilling all three terms, no matter how defined, is problematic due to inherent distributional—and therefore political—tensions between them.

For the most part, governments and multilateral institutions have concentrated on only two of three terms: economic growth and environmental protection, with the emphasis decidedly on the former (World Bank, 1992). The environmental consequences of economic development are essentially considered to be unfortunate side-effects that must be ameliorated. When it comes to environmental concerns, the bulk of the resources go to the search for technological solutions to industrial pollution (Hurtubia, 1991).

What are the consequences of this conceptualization of the relationship between economy and environment for the problem of the link between social equity and environmental degradation?

Within the current climate of economic orthodoxy, achieving economic growth (measured as per capita GNP) requires building market economies (which may necessitate dismantling the fetters that impede their functioning) and integrating them into world markets. To protect the environment from the over-exploitation of natural resources, multilateral lending institutions now require that large-scale development projects in mining, energy, and agriculture consider their environmental impact.² Water and air pollution, as well as refuse and sewage treatment, have also been high on the agenda (World Bank, 1991; Inter-American Development Bank, 1991; Le Prestre, 1989).

Under these conditions, the concept of social equity—much less the environment—receives little attention in its own right. It is assumed that growth in per capita GNP will result in a trickle down effect that will address some basic needs: income, housing, education, health. Of course, it is true that water and air quality, as well as refuse and sewage treatment, more directly address a population's basic needs because of their beneficial consequences for public health. However, these services generally are for urban areas, not rural and forest environments.

Even when studies address the basic needs question, one obvious achilles heel of the dominant approach to sustainable development is that it ignores the problem of income distribution—the development for whom question—which is particularly acute in Latin America. Nor does it address the larger issues of social, economic, political and cultural self-determination, autonomy, and protection from exclusive reliance on the market for the survival of people who are not thoroughly integrated in market economies, or, who if they are, find themselves at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder.

The mainstream definition of sustainable development has clear cut policy implications. Governments, with financing from multilateral lending institutions, concentrate their efforts on the

establishment of large-scale industry and agribusiness to the exclusion of almost everything else (Rich, 1985 and 1990; Hall, 1989). In forest areas this leads to sharp divergences of interest between bureaucrats, businessmen, and landowners on the one hand, and dispossessed or displaced small-scale subsistence farmers, Indian communities, and others who derive a living from the forest on the basis of multiple extractive activities. The question remains. What factors induce the state to pay attention to their concerns? When does public policy focus on the sustainable development of forests at the community level, emphasizing technologies that promote local self-reliance and control of a more equitable distribution of wealth?

EXPLAINING THE PUBLIC POLICY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Most studies of deforestation conform to one of two types. One concentrates on the identification of the general or proximate causes of deforestation: overpopulation, poverty, pursuit of agricultural or industrial development at any cost, bureaucratic incompetence or incapacity, specific government policies such as subsidies that set up perverse incentive structures, the priorities of multilateral lending banks (Repetto, 1988; Mahar, 1989; Goodman and Hall, 1990; Rich, 1985 and 1990). Having identified the principal causes of deforestation, solutions advocate righting the wrong. Policy prescriptions exhort population control, general poverty alleviation, correct market incentives or political action to balance economic growth with environmental protection.

A second type of study concerns itself more directly with the fate of economically and socially underprivileged groups in the forest. They start from the assumption that forests are multiple use zones that can and do provide its dwellers with a living. These studies model small-scale sustainable development projects—which often refine native forest dweller techniques or mimic natural processes—that link communities to markets. They hope that governments or other institutions will adopt them

on a larger scale. Such projects include among others, agroforestry, community forestry, wood harvesting, the ranching of native fauna, extractive reserves, and ecotourism (Posey, 1985; Gradwohl and Greenberg, 1988; Browder, 1989; Anderson, 1990).

Although both of these approaches are worthwhile in their own right, neither addresses the conditions under which their policy prescriptions may become public policy (Hurrell, 1991). For the most part, they limit themselves to invocations of the need for political will to carry out policy reforms (Goldsworthy, 1988). This technocratic conception of politics assumes that once technically correct policy prescriptions have been found, change only requires public authorities to muster the courage to challenge established interests and drive through reforms. Such approaches downplay the fact that states are only relatively autonomous from society. Policies that lead to unsustainable development and inequitable distribution of wealth are supported by powerful coalitions that share a common set of values and interests. Public authorities ignore these coalitions at their own peril, and know it. This implies that governments usually challenge those interests only when alternative coalitions of value, interests and power support them (Goldsworthy, 1988; Silva, forthcoming, 1993).

Framing the problem this way suggests that a political economy approach may be the most useful starting point for uncovering the conditions under which public officials adopt policies of sustainable development that favor grassroots development. In this paper, "political economy" is very broadly defined. It refers to an analytical framework that seeks to identify a wide range of state, social, international, and nongovernmental actors; and then roots their motivation and actions to their economic, cultural and political interests (Schmink and Wood, 1987; Gourevitch, 1986; Haggard, 1990).

From this perspective, policies change according to the configuration of shifting alliances with varying power resources. Social groups and institutional actors ally on the basis of shared interests. The relative power of these coalitions depends on a number of factors, such as the issue area's

salience; the economic strength of social groups (Gourevitch, 1986); the amount of state support those groups can count on (Bratton, 1990; Miliband, 1969); an actor's capacity to inflict political costs on the government—e.g., social disruption which may either be a veto power or exercise a catalytic function; a group's organizational capability, particularly in the case of underprivileged groups (Eckstein, 1989; Bunker 1985). Moreover, Latin American societies are heavily penetrated by and dependent on external actors. This means that the source of international support for domestic actors is often crucial for the relative power of competing coalitions (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979).

THE CASE STUDIES

This paper seeks to disentangle actors, interests and power resources, as well as to trace how alliances among actors based on shared interests augment their political power. In the process, it will examine the cases in relation to four factors: (1) The initial disposition of the state towards such programs, from relative degrees of resistance to cooperation; (2) The degree of local social conflict and organization; (3) the configuration of alliances; and (4) the degree and type of international actor involvement. The concluding section will address the significance of these cases for teasing out the conditions under which one or more of these factors are relevant for understanding policy outcomes.

Extractive Reserves in Brazil

Of the Amazon basin nations, Brazil has by far captured the lion's share of the attention. It has done so not only because it outstrips other countries in terms of the sheer area covered by its rainforests, but because it also has one of the highest levels of deforestation (Fearnside, 1990). The felling of the forest was a direct consequence of Brazil's aggressive, well-articulated, ambitious and

widely publicized economic development and colonization plan for the region. As far as the Brazilian government was concerned, forests were empty lands of little or no intrinsic economic value. Their conversion to cattle ranching, the exploitation of mineral resources, the generation of energy, and the granting plots of land to migrants to diffuse social tension were the state's primary goals (Bunker, 1985; Guimaraes, 1991; Mahar, 1989; Hecht, 1985; Hall, 1989).

Until recently, then, the Brazilian government was clearly uninterested in the concept of sustainable development, not even in the limited manner in which multilateral lending institutions defined it in practice, if not always in principle. Brazil steadfastly opposed the creation of reserves for the use of native and non-native forest dwellers. The state's anti-environmental stance led it to flout contractual obligations with multilateral lending institutions that were financing large-scale development and colonization projects, programs which contained clauses aimed at controlling some of their most deleterious environmental consequences (Schwartzman, 1991).

Beginning in the 1970s, the Brazilian government's Amazonian land use policy generated mounting social tension in the region. Far from being "empty lands," Amazonia was home to diverse socio-economic and cultural groups. Rubber tappers, river dwellers, and native peoples inhabited the region. Colonists followed in the 1970s, establishing their often tenuous claims to small plots of land laid out side by side in large grids. The relationship among these groups was far from easy. The massive subsidization of cattle ranching in Brazilian Amazonia, however, introduced a new and ultimately unifying dimension into the region's conflictual social relations. The cattle ranchers, often in collusion with local and/or regional authorities, coerced colonists, rubber tappers, river dwellers, and native peoples alike into giving up their lands; and land was the main source of their livelihood (however meager), social cohesion, and cultural identity (Cockburn and Hecht, 1988; Ramos, 1984; Goodman and Hall, 1990).³

The struggle over land gave birth to the idea of the extractive reserve, conceived as a form of land-use that would benefit local non-elite groups as well as protect the forest. The idea was to set aside extensive areas of the forest for the near-exclusive use of groups that extract economic resources from the forest without destroying it beyond the point of spontaneous regeneration. For example, rubber tappers need the trees in order to obtain the product they sell. By the same token, native peoples resort to swidden-fallow and agroforestry systems of cultivations on small plots of well-dispersed land (Goodman and Hall, 1990; Posey, 1985).

In the 1990s, the Brazilian government gave way to international and domestic pressure and began to establish a number of extractive reserves. What was the composition of the coalition that changed Brazil's course? Around what values and interests did such a diverse group of actors come together? What power resources did the coalition draw from? These questions drive the following all-too-condensed exposition of the Brazilian case.

The cattle ranchers' violent actions gave dispossessed and threatened groups a common interest around which to forge an alliance (Hecht, 1985). That alone, however, was not a sufficient condition for the formation of a coalition, nor would such an alliance be strong enough to win on its own. First, rubber tappers, river dwellers, native peoples, and colonists required organization, which they acquired in ever increasing degrees. Moreover, their organizations were often linked to larger national movements. For example, the rubber tappers were affiliated with the national labor movement and with Brazil's Labor Party. Such connections took the struggle out of its purely rural context, where landowners easily dominated (Cockburn and Hecht, 1988; Goodman and Hall, 1990; Payne, 1991).

Brazilian and international environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) played a key role in cementing the alliance among Amazonian social groups, and in bringing increased pressure to bear on the Brazilian government. The Brazilian Institute for Amazonian Studies (IAS)

developed the idea of the extractive reserve and played a central role in organizing and bringing together rubber tappers, river dwellers and colonists. The IAS also had connections with international NGOs. They brought U.S. congressional pressure to bear on the multilateral development banks to halt disbursement of loans for Amazonian development projects until Brazil addressed the deforestation issue (Schwartzman, 1991; Aufderheide and Rich, 1988).⁴

The combination of growing internal and external pressure finally forced the Brazilian government to take notice and to establish extractive reserves. In the process, it also created a series of national parks and reserves for native peoples (Environmental Defense Fund, 1991; Garrison, 1991; Albert, 1992). External pressure in the form of transnational coalitions finally got the Brazilian government to realize that it could not continue its profligate ways. But the fact that extractive reserves were created, rather than some other form of land use, was the result of the demands of the Amazonian social coalition, born of local conflicts, and advised by a Brazilian policy advocacy environmental NGO.

Community Forestry in Mexico: Nohbec

Nohbec, in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, is a relatively successful example of community forestry. It shows how a community can sustainably extract wood from the forest and add industrial value to it as well.⁵ Moreover, substantial amounts of the money made from the industry go back to the community in the form of health and education benefits.⁶ Nohbec's experience laid the groundwork for state and national community forestry policy.

What conditions made Nohbec possible? To begin with, both national and state governments favored a grassroots-oriented forestry policy. During the 1970s, the national government decided that the system of exclusive forest concessions to private companies—established in the 1950s—did not

work. These decisions were largely made by the Federal Forest Service, a dependency of the Secretariat of Agriculture and Water Resources (SARH). When the concession system expired in 1983, national forestry policy called for the replacement of industrial concessions with participatory community forestry (Bray, 1991; Snook, 1991).

National policy clearly opened up an opportunity, but additional factors were necessary to transform that opportunity into a social forestry project, one in which the community reaped the economic benefits and distributed them equitably. One important condition was the historical tension between concessionaires and the community. This contributed to Nohbec's drive to organize a functioning cooperative, with a leadership dedicated to the improvement of the community's income level. On their own, however, cooperatives such as Nohbec were not strong enough to successfully negotiate prices with the buying companies. Nor was Nohbec capable of obtaining credit to build an industry, or of warding off SARH's attempts to control the community's income (Argüelles, 1991).⁷ In short, Nohbec needed allies to provide technical assistance and the political space necessary for their project to succeed.

It found both. The Governor of Quintana Roo approved of the project and wanted to see it flourish (Snook, 1991). He forced companies to negotiate directly with the cooperatives and made credit available. He also assured the cooperatives control over sales and profits by foiling SARH's attempt to manage those funds for the cooperatives.⁸ By the same token, the source of technical assistance—the German Development Agency (GTZ)—was crucial to the Governor's enthusiasm for the project. Support from such a prestigious official international source gave Nohbec's leaders a respectability and credibility they may not have had otherwise. On their own they may have been perceived as little more than a dangerous group of radical peasants.⁹ The GTZ team that helped to design Nohbec's social forestry experiment was mainly composed of expatriots who had lived in Mexico for many years and understood both local needs and capacities, as well as the national

political system. The main strength of the project's design lay in its open-endedness; it was conceived as a process rather than a finished product with set timetables and procedures. This gave it great flexibility (Snook, 1991).

In the context of favorable national government policy, what was the result of this alliance between local communities, the GTZ and state government? In the first phase, between 1983 and 1985, it led to the establishment of two cooperatives. One near Chetumal, where Nohbec is located, that covered 100,000 hectares, and one to the south among the Maya occupying an area of 150,000 hectares (Argüelles, 1991).

But in 1986-87 Nohbec faced a second challenge, a change in the Mexican presidency and state government. Here, Nohbec confronted two significant problems. One of them was to strengthen the community's organization to make it more independent from the patronage of any particular government. To this end, Nohbec created its own technical department, and, with the help of the governor, who also recognized the need for greater autonomy, the ejido (a form of communal land tenure) obtained the legal right to negotiate contracts with the government and to hire its own technical personnel.¹⁰ As a result, May 1986 saw the birth of the Sociedad de Productores Forestales Ejidales de Quintana Roo. In June the Sociedad signed a contract with SARH, and set up its first sawmills (Argüelles, 1991).

A second problem for the institutionalization of social forestry at Nohbec was the need to change the role of the Quintana Roo's forest service from a policing agency to one that supported peasant cooperatives. Again the role of the governor and the GTZ proved invaluable. First, the governor launched the State Forestry Plan, in which Nohbec leaders and technicians played a key role. This committed SARH to a treaty regulating forestry practices. Secondly, he instructed SARH to give technical assistance to community forestry (Argüelles, 1991).

Nohbec' economic and social institutionalization, along with changes in SARH's approach to community forestry as a result of the State Forestry Plan, have placed the Sociedad on as strong a footing as possible for independent growth and action in the future. However, Nohbec still relies on the strategic guidance from its GTZ-financed advisors to keep the process going. They are key to overcoming political, economic, and organizational obstacles.

Agroforestry in Peru: Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo¹¹

In 1991, the regional government of Amazonas in Iquitos issued a decree that established the 322,500 hectare Reserva Comunal Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo. The reserve is divided into roughly equal halves, one devoted to subsistence use and the other is a fully protected reserve (Amazon Conservation Fund--ACF, 1991). The settlements along the Tamshiyacu and Tahuayo rivers in Northeastern Peru have rights to the former. By the 1980s, communities and land-use practices in the area were well-established. Prior to the 1970s, the land had belonged to estates that produced rubber, barbasco (mullein), and rosewood oil for local markets. Due to the development of synthetics, production shifted to the extraction of fish, game and timber. Agrarian reform broke up the estates, but local settlements continued to manage the lands and to supply local markets (Coomes, 1990).

With the break-up of the estate system, however, the lands became an open access area. Game, fish and timber were being depleted. Conflicts over land-use rights motivated several local communities to take steps to regulate it, and to establish nondestructive exploitation of the forest (Coomes, 1990). They developed systems to cultivate fruits, intensively manage crops, harvest animal products, and for the extraction of forest fruits, handicraft fibers, and medicinal plants (Padoch et al., 1985). Beginning in 1985, U.S., British and Peruvian scientists aided local communities in the

design of sustainable land-use systems to rebuild depleted animal stocks and to improve agroforestry systems (Bodmer, et al., 1990).

In order to change the open access status of the region, the river settlements and the scientific community--the latter organized in an international NGO to collect funds--worked with the Ministry of Agriculture in Iquitos (AFC, 1991). But their efforts did not bear fruit until the 1990s, when a Peruvian scientist connected to the project became a high-ranking official in the regional ministry. With his help, the Reserva obtained legal status, giving the area right to selfmanagement. Even with this official's backing, however, getting the decree was no easy task due to opposition from loggers and cattle ranchers. Reports from the field suggest that enforcement of the reserve status is still less than adequate.

The description of this case has concentrated on the development of sustainable agro-forestry and extractive land use practices for subsistence and local markets. However, the experience has also promoted collective action to regulate access to the land, and to pool resources for health and education, which absorb a large proportion of the residents' income (AFC, 1991; Bodmer et al., 1990). To this end, communities are working closely with a Peruvian NGO, the Asociación de Desarrollo de Amazonía Rural (ADAR), and with the more international Amazon Conservation Fund. This suggests a serious effort to build a virtuous cycle of development at the local level in the face of sometimes debilitating obstacles.

Community Forestry in Peru: The Pichis-Palcazú Special Project

With the reestablishment of democracy in 1980, came a renewed effort by the Peruvian national government to integrate Amazonia with the rest of the country. To this end, Fernando Belaúnde-Terry's administration solicited funding and technical assistance from international

organizations to carry out a number of special projects in road-building, colonization, agricultural and forestry production, and the improvement of local living standards (Valcárcel, 1991).

The Pichis-Palcazú Special Project, in Peru's central selva, began when the Peruvian government decided to build a portion of the Jungle Marginal Highway between Villa Rica and Pucallpa with the support of USAID--the United States Agency for International Development (Central Selva Resource Management, n.d.). USAID foresaw the drastic impact of the road and subsequent colonization on the region's natural resources and native population. As a result, in 1982 it began a regional development program--the Central Selva Resource Management Project (CSRM)--in the Palcazú valley to develop sustained yield land use, to protect the native cultures and biodiversity (Hartshorn, 1989; Central Selva Resource Management, n.d.). The CSRM is a joint project between USAID and the government of Peru. Its principal economic activity is sustained yield forestry in cooperation with the Center for Tropical Studies, which, under the guidance of Gary Hartshorn, pioneered a system of tree harvesting based on the forest's natural strip-clearing cycles (Hartshorn, 1989).

In the beginning, the CSRM project had the typical top down developmentalist bias of most large-scale international agency efforts. In the best technocratic style, it wanted to demonstrate that effective resource management can achieve long-term sustainable production and economic growth. Thus, although the project focused on improving conditions for peasant and native communities, the affected population was rarely informed nor consulted in the planning stages. As a result, the project began to flounder because of the lack of involvement of the local target population, especially the Yanesha Indians, who formed the largest native group in the area (Fernández-Dávila, 1992).

These problems led the CSRM to reevaluate the project and to find ways to involve the local population and make use of their knowledge. Secure land-tenure for local peoples became an important goal, giving birth to the Yanesha Communal reserve (35,000 hectares) to secure areas for

traditional extractive use of timber, hunting and gathering. In consultation with the Yanesha and other communities, Hartshorn developed and refined the project's strip-cutting method of sustained yield tree harvesting (Hartshorn, 1989; Fernández-Dávila, 1992).

The CSRM and the scientific community also helped the Yanesha to organize by sponsoring the creation of the Yanesha Forestry Cooperative (YFC) in May 1986. Consistent with Yanesha social organization, the YFC sought to build community expertise in managing the communal reserve's extractive activities (Cooperativa Forestal Yanesha, n.d.). With the aid of low interest loans, the YFC acquired equipment to operate the tree felling, hauling, and initial processing phases of the enterprise (Hartshorn, 1989; Fernández-Dávila, 1992).

The project's long-term viability, however, depends on the strength of the Yanesha Forestry Cooperative. A strong cooperative reinforces the commitment of individual Yanesha to collectively engage in sustained yield forest management. Without it, they might be tempted to sell off land rights (Hartshorn, 1989). But the cooperative is not that strong. In part this is because the project has largely been outside donor-driven in nature. As a result, the YFC was more of a top-down creation than an organization born of a people's internal needs and experience. This fragility is compounded by the cooperative's uncertain economic prospects.¹² Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties, it is far too early to draw conclusions with respect to this experience's success or failure.

CONCLUSIONS: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This paper sought to disentangle actors, interests and power resources in an effort to understand the kinds of coalitions that are necessary to push through grass-roots sustainable development policies. Although more studies are required, the evidence of our four cases suggested

that variation on three or four factors affected the type of coalition required to get such policies adopted. Those conditions were: the initial disposition of the state towards such programs, the degree of local social conflict, whether or not local groups were organized, and the role of international actors.

The Brazilian case suggests that great pressure must be brought to bear when relatively powerful, well established states resist policies that promote sustainable development at the grass-roots level. High levels of social conflict, among well organized groups with national political and institutional affiliations, were required to bring the issue to the national political arena. In the absence of such conditions, the government—whether authoritarian or democratic—could simply ignore the problem.

However, the domestic groups by themselves were not strong enough to prevail. They could agitate, but not win. Greater pressure was required to induce the Brazilian government to act. Under those circumstances, the connection between local policy advocacy NGOs and international NGOs proved crucial. Local NGOs had helped to build a coalition in favor of extractive reserves in Brazil. The international NGOs swayed U.S. public opinion, and learned how to influence congressional committees capable of pressuring multilateral lending institutions into taking action against flagrant contractual violations of environmental clauses. It was this last action, the suspension of loans and the threat of further international difficulties, that persuaded the Brazilian government to take the environmentalists seriously.

The likelihood of repeating such a grand international coalition seems improbable.¹³ No other Latin American country has such a vast extension of rainforests, which was, after all, partially what had turned Brazil into an international symbol. Fortunately, not all governments are so resistant to the idea of promoting sustainable development. Nevertheless, simply because a government shows

greater receptivity to the idea does not mean that such projects will materialize, or that they will focus on producing virtuous cycles at the grassroots level if they do.

The Nohbec and Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo experiences suggest that some degree of social conflict and organization at the grassroots are important. In effect, one may feed the other. Tension among social groups is often a catalyst for organization, which then provides the drive from within to make the project happen in accord with their own goals. Knowing that they cannot act alone, communities often actively seek allies. If they find them in government they will strive to infuse policy content with their interests. Were the communities unorganized, they would simply be the objects of top-down government planning efforts. And, those, well meaning as they may be in some respects, often are not oriented towards the creation of virtuous cycles at the grassroots. That is because governments usually mistrust independent groups.

Organization by itself, however, does not insure that favorably disposed governments will adopt policies that take grassroots concerns into account. International actors and domestic NGOs provided critical support for local communities in their efforts to shape policies emanating from relatively sympathetic government offices. In Nohbec the strong presence of the well-respected German GTZ was crucial to project design and in legitimizing the community's demands. The governor supported the Nohbec politically, but only after he had bona-fide evidence of the cooperative's respectability, a consequence of its GTZ sponsorship. In Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo, the international and local scientific community were able to represent community interests to the local government. This affected policy content, especially with respect to clauses aimed at keeping out loggers and cattle ranchers. Local NGOs then provided the necessary support to expand welfare provision in the area. That Nohbec received much stronger international institutional support, and specifically from the GTZ rather than some other agency, probably explains why it was a better organized and less contradictory effort than Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo.¹⁴

The discussion has centered on the coalitions that were necessary to establish grassroots-oriented policies of sustainable development when government opposed or supported the general idea. Can such policies be introduced when relatively weak governments are largely indifferent to sustainable development at the grassroots, and when local social conflict over, and organization for land use are largely absent? Here, we must remember that Latin American countries rely heavily on foreign funding for their development projects. As a result, the Pichis-Palcazú case suggested that the goals of the lead international agency will be crucial. The Peruvian government basically wanted funds to build transportation infrastructure in the area. USAID foresaw the environmental and social consequences and initiated the project for grassroots sustainable development. USAID was able to control the project because it kept a large field presence, in part because the Peruvian government lacked the human resources to fully manage it.¹⁵

The Pichis-Palcazú case also highlights the relevance of local social organization for project design and implementation. USAID originally wanted to implement it in a top down manner. There was no local drive to shape the direction of events, to act as an internal impetus in search of external partners both reaching for the same goal. As a result, the project began to flounder. Moreover, the creation of local social organization from outside, while it has helped the project immensely, still calls its viability into question.

In conclusion, while much research remains to be done, these four cases disentangle some of the general conditions necessary for policies of sustainable development that promote virtuous cycles at the grassroots. Where government is resistant, it will take high levels of social conflict and very broad alliances of local, national and international actors to force it to change its course. Where government is largely indifferent or weak, international actors may be the most important, but unsuccessful without involvement at the local level. Where government is favorable local actors may succeed largely on their own, but international actors and local NGOs make important contributions to

policymaking. In the process, the evidence highlights the centrality of local organization and participation in relatively successful projects, even when government is favorably disposed.

ENDNOTES

1. There is, of course, quite a debate over whether it is possible to have economic growth and be able to protect the environment. See, Herman E. Daly, "Sustainable Growth: A Bad Oxymoron," Grassroots Development, 15, 3, 1991. There are also a number of more eco-centered definitions centered on concepts such as through-puts, steady states, and carrying capacity.

2. The primary multilateral lending institutions are the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

3. The level of violence was so dramatic that Amnesty International (1988) devoted a special report to it.

4. The Environmental Defense Fund has a complete packet of data on the exchanges between international NGOs, the Senate Appropriations Committee and multilateral lending institutions.

5. Community forestry refers to the practice of promoting participation and providing direct benefits to local peoples through tree growing, forest management, or forest conservation activities (Cabarle, 1991).

6. These data are richly illustrated in "Talking with the God of Money," an independent film production of Norman Lippman, St. Louis, Missouri.

7. Many of the details were provided by Alfonso Argüelles, a Nohbec community leader and functionary of the Plan Piloto Forestal, in a personal interview with the author in St. Louis on 3/14/92.

8. Alfonso Argüelles, personal interview with the author 3/14/92.

9. Alfonso Argüelles, personal interview with the author, 3/14/92.

10. Ejidos were inalienable grants of land given to peasant communities in the wake of the

Mexican revolution. In 1992, ejidos acquired the right to sell the land under certain conditions.

11. Agroforestry is a multiple-use style of land management. It includes wood extraction, but its principal component is the cultivation and harvesting of edible and marketable produce and products from the forest, and from small plots cut into it.

12. Personal interview with Patricia Fernández-Dávila in St. Louis, Missouri, March, 1992. She is the executive director of Asociación Amazonía, a Peruvian NGO.

13. In the absence of such pressure, it seems equally improbable that administrations bent on policies of deforestation and unsustainable development will change. At present Ecuador seems to bear such speculation out. Ecuador has a high degree of social conflict in Amazonia, particularly between organized native peoples, colonists and oil companies. Despite alliances with local NGOs, and national awareness of the issue, the Ecuadorean government has shown no sign of changing its policies toward the region. Some of the better publicized parks and reserves are suffering as a result.

14. The greater homogeneity of the Nohbec cooperative v. the heterogeneity of population in the Peruvian sector is, no doubt, also an important factor to understand differences in the Nohbec and Tamshiacu-Tahuayo experiences. Moreover, the specific institutional characteristics of GTZ also influenced the relative success of Nohbec's grassroots orientation.

15. This suggests an interesting research project. Why did USAID apparently follow through more on its environmental conditions than the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank in Brazil?

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