

UN-REDD and the Yasuní-ITT Initiative as Global Environmental Governance Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

The importance of reaching out to and including local stakeholders and local norms is becoming a factor within the formation and implementation of global environmental governance mechanisms. In recent years the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) block of the Ecuadorian Yasuni National Park has caught widespread international attention due to its biological and cultural diversity, as well as its impact on carbon emissions at a time when climate change is a big concern for many. This article evaluates the contradictions and imperatives of two initiatives, the first being the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, formulated domestically on alternative non-extraction norms. The second is the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) based on an international foundation of accepted norms pursuant in the existing Kyoto Protocol. While further research needs to be done on their applicability as overarching regimes are shaped around existing neoliberal frameworks and extraction norms, both models have shown the importance of the role of such international organizations as the United Nations in global environmental governance.

Introduction

The decision to leave oil underground in order to protect the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) block of the Yasuní National Park in the Ecuadorian Amazon is an example of a local initiative to a global environmental challenge. In the twenty-first century, alternative global governance mechanisms are being developed to combat the widespread loss of forests and their biological diversity as well as the more general risks posed by climate change. Two mechanisms whose implementations strive to achieve these goals are the Ecuadorian Yasuní-ITT Initiative and the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD).

These two governance mechanisms are formulated under different norms, which will be compared and contrasted in order to assess their applicability to future global environmental governance.

Scientists first discovered in the 1960s, and confirmed as recently as 2007, approximately 846 million barrels of oil, or an estimated 20 percent of Ecuador's total oil reserves, in the ITT block of the Yasuní National Park (UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, 2011). The Amazonian Park covers 9,820 km², is the country's largest protected area, and is designated as a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve (Finer, Vijay, Ponce, Jenkins, & Kahn, 2009). In 1994, the Yasuní Research Station and the Tiputini Biodiversity Station were established in the park, and their findings revealed that the park is one of the most biologically diverse spots on earth. For example, Yasuní contains more than 655 species of trees in one hectare of land, which is more than the total number of species within the United States and Canada combined. More beetle species were found on one tree than in all of Europe (Blair, 2011; Bülow, 2013).

Native to this part of the Amazon are the Waorani (or Huaorani), a recently uncontacted indigenous group with a violent history of protecting their territory from unwanted intruders (Finer et al., 2009). Deeper in the reserve, the Tagaeri and Taromenane continue to live in voluntary isolation; however, these indigenous groups' livelihoods and centuries-old traditions are threatened by outside interference, most urgently the threat of non-renewable resource extraction (Larrea, 2009).

Global Environmental Governance and Climate Change

The Ecuadorian troubles are part of the world's environmental challenges and subsequent environmental governance, which strives to achieve sustainability by bringing together political, social, and economic activities and to manage them as subsections of the environment and ecosystems. The achievement of sustainability through environmental governance often necessitates the development of alternative governing systems to address such global environmental challenges as climate change. Norm-based solutions have the opportunity to develop profound mechanisms that will encourage both human well-being and environmental protection. Environmental governance models like Yasuní-ITT and UN-REDD include governments, but also other actors in the system and strongly emphasize collaboration among these dynamic forces.

On both global and local scales, climate change and the management of carbon dioxide emissions have become topics of constant debate due to their immediate effects on humanity (Vogel, 2009). A primary international agreement to mitigate climate change is the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, that sets binding obligations on nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, 191 nations are parties to the protocol, with the list merely excluding Andorra, Canada, South Sudan, and the United States. The first commitment of the protocol was from 2008 to 2012 and a second commitment has yet to take force. A desire to implement post-Kyoto frameworks is growing with climate change displaying humanity's vulnerability to a change in climate patterns, which was most recently indicated through Hurricane Sandy. Regarding the effects climate change has on South America, glacier retreat in Ecuador and the larger Andes Mountains is threatening to impact the livelihoods of approximately 100 million people. A change in climate patterns is impacting both hydrological cycles and threatening to disrupt Amazonian ecosystems (World Bank Report, 2008; Amazon Watch, 2012).

The preservation of Amazonian rainforests plays an important role in mitigating the effects of climate change, namely through carbon sequestration. Trees take carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in biomass and soil, which provides a carbon sink. A forest thus serves as a natural reservoir for accumulating and storing carbon dioxide, and this ability makes it an important natural phenomenon to assimilate a certain amount of the excessive carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere through human

activity. Globally, forests absorb 8.8 billion tons of CO₂ every year, and Ecuador's Yasuní has an average of 600 trees per acre, which would be equivalent to 3.9 tons per acre and a total 9.75 million tons of CO₂ absorbed (Clayton, 2011). Moreover, if the nearly 850 million barrels of oil in the ITT block of the Yasuní National Park were left underground, this would account for an additional avoidance of 406 million tons of CO₂ emissions (Baki, 2012).

Local Movements and Norms for Change

As early as the 1990s, accelerating neoliberal reforms and environmental consequences of oil spills entrenched the Ecuadorian indigenous movement in conflicts over natural resource use and extraction (Martin & Wilmer, 2008). In October 1997, indigenous groups journeyed from Puyo to Quito to push for incorporating plurinationality (the equal coexistence of two or more national groups) in the Ecuadorian constitution. According to the group Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, plurinationality would push against neoliberal policies that had failed to address growing social, economic, political, and environmental ills (Sawyer, 2004). In *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador*, Sawyer argues that sociopolitical changes will not originate from the presidential palace or legislative chambers. Rather, change will emerge from the plazas, the streets, and the marches, from where it will be "slinking across the country" like "a boa" to touch upon all levels of the Ecuadorian political hierarchy (2004, p. 212).

Current global governance mechanisms to preserve the Amazonian basin are framed within *buen vivir* (living well), which is the indigenous perception of living in harmony with nature. Uruguayan academic Gudynas describes *buen vivir* as a plural concept designed to be an alternative to Western models of development (Gudynas, 2011). The model goes beyond Western standards of economic growth and progress by recognizing that materialism is not a determining factor in human well-being (Martin, 2011a). Rather, Gudynas explains that *buen vivir* incorporates a "set of rights that include, among other, those of freedom, participation, communities, protection, and the rights of Nature" (Gudynas, 2011, p. 443).

According to former Minister of Energy and Mining Alberto Acosta, within the proposal of the good life, among other aspects, it is essential to avoid natural resource extraction for the sole purpose of generating new wealth (Acosta & Martinez, 2009). Instead, according to this vision, people should see themselves as a part of nature rather than dominating it, and the implementation of the "good life" will be key towards saving the planet (Martin, 2011a). Under these normative underpinnings, anti-oil extraction would become an accepted custom and social movement. Transnational networks would form as leverage for the adoption of global governance mechanisms for climate change and the maintenance of biodiversity.

Institutionalization of *Buen Vivir*

In the mid-2000s, domestic actors collaborated with the state to institutionalize *buen vivir*, a unique and uncommon process referred to as the counter boomerang effect. The Ecuadorian state became the representative of normative change by granting rights to nature in its 2008 Constitution, thereby becoming the first nation to recognize environmental entitlements (Martin, 2011a). This norm and its interpretation in the Ecuadorian Constitution call for a transformation from an oil-dependent Ecuador into a country conserving its biodiversity in order to maintain quality of life; the transformation is to occur by promoting sustainable development without recognizing the capitalist market as the driving force of development (UN-REDD Programme Policy Board, 2011). Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa explained the vision of the Ecuadorian indigenous people at a 2009 lecture at the Chatham House in London. He stated, "like friendship, happiness and security, the environment is priceless. . . . To conserve nature for future generations can be an end in itself. We need nature to live" (as cited in Rival, 2010, p. 358).

According to Acosta and Gudynas, the norm's plural concept and construction advances theoretical debates towards understanding development as progress versus establishing another relationship with nature (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011). Recent institutional developments surrounding living well indicate that *buen vivir* serves as a political platform, presenting Ecuador the opportunity to design and implement alternative governance mechanisms that will aid the country in maintaining its biological and cultural diversity at a time where climate change is increasingly becoming an indicator for necessary change at social, political, and economic levels. This does not only apply to Ecuador but also to the world. A key question will be how the existing Yasuni-ITT Initiative and/or the UN-REDD Programme can promote local and national levels of collaboration to the global level within non-extraction frameworks without being overcome by the wider accepted and thoroughly implemented norms of extraction and emission (Martin, 2011).

Yasuni-ITT Initiative

The principal solution brought forth in Ecuador by both domestic actors and the state to protect the ITT block and to maintain its biodiversity within the Ecuadorian Amazon as well as to reduce both carbon emissions and poverty, while refraining from oil extraction, is the Yasuni-ITT Initiative. Under this initiative, the Ecuadorian government is proposing a post-Kyoto framework or, as Acosta puts it, from "Kyoto to Quito" (Martin, 2011b). The idea behind the initiative is to pursue and implement a different vision by moving beyond both Kyoto's carbon markets and "mercantilizing the ecology" (Martin, 2011b). Therefore, the aims and norms driving this initiative weave the indigenous worldview with global norms from international institutions. Ecuador's proposal is a leap from accepted norms, as the initiative aims to transform global environmental governance toward harmony between man and nature (Martin, 2011b).

President Correa presented this initiative to the international community during the United Nations General Assembly session in September 2007. He called for co-responsibility with the rest of the world based on the analysis that "climate change does not have borders" and that the distribution of CO₂ emissions is significantly larger in the global North than the relatively undeveloped global South (Correa, 2007). The international community pledged to pay for avoided carbon emissions by contributing \$350 million for a period of 10 years or less than 50 percent of the oil's estimated market value (sosyasuni.org).

This money is to be placed into a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Multi-Partner Trust Fund, where the contributions would be steered towards several distinct projects based on Ecuador's National Development Plan for the Good Life. The funding has two windows:

1. The Capital Fund Window that will finance such renewable energy projects as hydro, geothermal, solar, wind, biomass, and tidal plants.
2. The Revenue Fund Window that will finance conservation, reforestation, energy efficiency, social programs, and research and innovation.

The government will issue donating entities Yasuni Guarantee Certificates in U.S. dollars equivalent to the donation's face value if above \$50,000 (UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, 2013).

The trust fund is overseen by a steering committee consisting of three government representatives, in addition to one civil society representative, two contributor representatives, and one technical secretary with no vote. All final decisions will be run through the Ecuadorian state so as not to impede on its sovereignty (UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, 2013). This national control over the global governance system makes it attractive for replication in other developing countries with high levels of biodiversity and natural resources, like Indonesia, Nigeria, Peru, Colombia, and Brazil (Martin, 2011b).

Nevertheless, since the initiative's launch, international funding has been difficult to obtain due to factors that include the international financial crisis, international guarantees that the oil will stay under the

ground after President Correa steps down, international structural difficulties to support keeping a needed fossil fuel under the ground, and the issue of leakage. Leakage refers to the process of Ecuador keeping its oil underground, while another nation elsewhere is pumping more (P. Martin, personal communication, April 18, 2013). For example, Germany, which has always been perceived to be the “sleeping giant,” was anticipated to lead other Northern nations in following German engagement in international forestry protection (Bülow, 2013). At the 2008 Convention on Biodiversity, German Chancellor Angela Merkel promised to give 500 million euros (about 652 million U.S. dollars) to threatened ecosystems, particularly forests, of which 50 million (about 65.2 million U.S. dollars) was set to flow to Yasuní annually (Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland, 2011; Bülow, 2013). Unfortunately, the German government chose to withdraw its funding under the statement that they were worried about setting a precedent for paying countries not to drill or log (Koenig, 2011).

Ecuador’s goal was to raise \$100 million by the end of 2011, but in the wake of the financial crisis and lingering economic instability this proved to be a challenge (Bernier, 2012). Spain donated \$1.4 million; two local authorities in France and Chile, and the national governments of Colombia, Georgia, and Turkey—countries that are neither very rich nor big polluters—contributed between \$50,000 and \$200,000 each (Bernier, 2012). Both Italy and Norway opted for debt forgiveness rather than providing donations; they cancelled Ecuador’s debt to them for \$51 million and \$20 million, respectively (Bernier, 2012).

By the end of December 2011, the Yasuní-ITT Initiative had collected \$116 million; however, to attain more funding, the Ecuadorian government has started approaching non-governmental organizations (NGOs) given their commitment to such causes. Several large NGOs, like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, approve of the proposal to leave oil underground but refuse to support government projects (Bernier, 2012). These NGOs also fear that the government will not use the money to protect ITT but to create government projects for oil extraction in the south of the country (P. Martin, personal communication, April 18, 2013). Other small NGOs, like Amazon Watch, Finding Species, Pachamama Alliance, World Resources Institute, Save America’s Forests, and Finding Species, among others, formed transnational networks around the Yasuní-ITT campaign to contribute by creating websites, organizing and funding celebrity visits, and promoting the initiative at such international events as the 2007 Earth Day Concert and two workshops in Quito and Washington, DC (Martin, 2011c).

From the private sector, several small contributions were made; Ryohin Keikaku Co. Ltd., a major Japanese retail company, contributed \$200,000 in December 2011. Additionally, the International Union of Charitable Organizations “World of Kindness” and the World Ecological Movement “Terra Viva” contributed \$100,000 together to the initiative in November 2011 (UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, 2011).

While this proposed global governance shows the interaction of state institutions and NGOs representative of environmental agendas, it also has a second aspect to it: a competition between the market and its actors through the Ecuadorian government’s Plan B to drill for oil in the ITT block if enough funding is not received (Martin, 2011b). The state-owned oil company EP PetroEcuador has continuously attempted to convince President Correa to drill, which has become increasingly profitable now that the price of oil has risen from \$60 a barrel in 2007 to more than \$100 in 2012 (Bernier, 2012).

President Correa’s ability to change from Plan A (leaving oil underground) to Plan B (drilling in the ITT block) generates the perception that the head of state possesses the ultimate power in this negotiation. However, this may be disproved because the president’s negotiating behavior is a reflection of contradicting imperatives wherein domestic and international pressures are inextricably linked, laying the foundation for a two level game (Putnam, 1988). In order for Plan A to succeed, Correa must balance his

dependence on international funding and maintenance of international credibility with his responsibilities to the people of Ecuador, among them his obligation to provide them with socioeconomic development.

UN-REDD Programme

The strong divisions among Southern norms and Northern funds generate a weak element in an economically unstable time. This leaves the desire to explore alternative mechanisms to preserve this area. One such initiative is the UN-REDD, which supports nationally led REDD+ processes and encourages the involvement of all stakeholders, including local communities of indigenous peoples, for the implementation of programs that preserve forests and avoid carbon dioxide emissions (UN-REDD, 2009c). REDD is an effort to receive financial value for the carbon stored in forests, thereby offering developing countries incentive to preserve their forests and invest in sustainable development with low carbon dioxide emittance. REDD+, or REDD-Plus, builds on REDD to include aspects of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and the development of forest carbon stocks (UN-REDD, 2009b).

UN-REDD operates on a different normative foundation than the Yasuní-ITT Initiative, as UN-REDD strives to expand the existing Kyoto framework, and thereby pertains to existing climate change and governance norms. The UN-REDD's primary focus lies on forest preservation so that forests can maintain their role as natural carbon sinks. While the protection of Yasuní under UN-REDD incorporates its biological and cultural diversity, this international mechanism does not account for that which lies underground.

UN-REDD supports programs in 46 countries spanning throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America, with a total funding of \$117.6 million (UN-REDD, 2009a). This program has become well established within the international community since its inception in 2008 and builds on the convening power and expertise of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the UNDP, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UN-REDD, 2009a). Thus far, \$4 million in funding has been attributed to Ecuador to support the government's capacity to prepare and implement the REDD+ strategies and involve all stakeholders in preserving the forests and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (UN-REDD, 2009d). The principal donors are Norway, Denmark, Japan, and Spain (UN-REDD, 2009e).

In 2009, the government of Ecuador launched a workshop to present its UN-REDD Programme to a diverse group of stakeholders, including mayors, parish council presidents, and national and international NGOs, as well as representatives from communities and indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Montubio organizations. The design of the program encourages multiple stakeholder participation, just as the Ecuadorian Constitution had laid the "formal structures for participation of all parts of society, including national and local NGOs, Indigenous Peoples, business sector, academia, international organizations present in the country, and others" (Issa, 2012).

Unfortunately, a significant lack of consensus concerning the UN-REDD can be perceived on both a domestic and an international level. Globally, indigenous peoples have mobilized in the wake of UN-REDD Programmes to call for a full respect of their personal and subsoil rights in accordance with UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (forestpeoples.org, 2009). Ecuadorian civil society expresses hesitance towards indirectly putting a price on nature. Furthermore, as Miller (2011) from Amazon Watch puts it, UN-REDD might provide the global North another opportunity to "buy cost effective carbon offsets rather than reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions" (n.p.).

However, regardless of the global North's funding objectives, a principle starting point towards emission reduction and environmental preservation for the global community would be to leave current endangered areas untouched. According to environmental NGO Acción Ecológica, the world has reached its peak concerning oil production, and this peak in combination with climate change are announcing the end of

the “fossil fuel era” (Acción Ecológica, 2008). Nevertheless, the plethora of actors interested and involved in the discussions of climate change (i.e., governments, NGOs, and civil society groups) should agree that a perfect global governance mechanism is still lacking, despite the urgency of the issue.

Issue Adoption by Civil Society

Theoretically, hesitance of civil society engagement towards the proposal of a new initiative may be expected. The UN-REDD constitutes a different framing of the issue of preserving the ITT block, which may cause advocates within existing transnational action networks to disagree. The question of political acceptability is of great importance because of the difficulty of selling the new framework to transnational political actors, as well as the potential fall-out effect on resource mobilization for the existing Yasuni-ITT Initiative (Carpenter, 2007).

Stakeholders’ trust in the finance mechanism, as well as transparency and distribution of benefits, would be central aspects of the program’s success (UN-REDD, 2009c). A recent governmental Capacity Needs Assessment of the UN-REDD Programme in Tanzania indicated that although a significant level of awareness existed at the national level, knowledge and technical skills at the district and village levels were limited (Ernst, 2012). While district development is a core intention of a UN-REDD Programme, capacity building will need to be provided in all future UN-REDD Programmes to enforce and recognize local communities’ rights, as well as to guarantee increased participation among these actors.

Fortunately, *buen vivir*, the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, and the introduction of REDD+ have expanded public understanding on the issue and contributed to an evolvement of the larger Ecuadorian public’s valuation of nature in its unexploited form. According to Myers (2001), value is “always involved in global as well as local circuits of exchange, display and storage” (n.p.). By valuing Yasuni for its diversity rather than for the market value of its oil and forests, supporters of the proposal have laid out a path for redefining the accepted norms and principles of oil extraction and the consumer culture. The impact of current developments have cascaded into a larger public awareness with many Ecuadorians believing that their country “needs to get out of oil dependency” and “build a less aggressive relation to the forest” (Rival, 2010). The public’s stance on these issues indicates the high likelihood of a continuous domestic involvement and activism towards preserving the Yasuni-ITT block.

Future Developments

It could be argued that the formation and institutionalization of *buen vivir* and global environmental governance mechanisms in the Amazon do not reflect traditional territorial divisions among state, local, and international levels (Martin, 2011a). According to scholar and author on global environmental governance Conca (2010), global ecological interdependence and increasing institutional involvement may lead to an erosion of state sovereignty. A closer look at both the Yasuni-ITT Initiative and REDD+ and their effects on the state and international community imply that the scope of state autonomy is potentially being narrowed, yet at the same time the problem-solving capacity of the state is increasing (2010). Under both mechanisms, the involvement of the United Nations provides a more profound international recognition toward the national desire to leave oil underground and preserve the forest in the Yasuni-ITT block. The role of international organizations in this case of global governance is to buffer national processes and provide monitoring and stability as well as to act as legitimacy brokers.

The Yasuni-ITT Initiative is unique in its incorporation of avoided emissions in addition to forest preservation. With this uncommon incorporation and its call for co-responsibility, the initiative may request a certain ecological consciousness from the global North. However, through its questioning of accepted resource extraction norms, the initiative may be undermined by its novelty and forward thinking (Blair, 2011). Compared to the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, UN-REDD is likely to receive more funding,

widespread support, and approval from the global North due to its foundation and promotion of the existing Kyoto Protocol framework. However, the fact that the REDD+ program does not incorporate the oil underneath the ITT block in its mechanism may prove a fundamental weakness to the program, since the country has previously experienced environmental contamination and indirect forest destruction from oil extraction related activities.

As these two proposals are formulated on different norms, further research would need to be done to determine their applicability in a time where globally accepted extraction norms may change in the wake of climate change, depleting fossil fuels, and lingering economic instability. Furthermore, future research would need to be done to determine how these mechanisms can be implemented globally under other nations' institutional conditions to assure that international standards are implemented while stakeholders participate and forests are protected. Evaluation techniques of existing programs will need to be examined to observe their impacts on people and the forests; institutionalists, economists, and anthropologists need to examine these programs to test how effective theories of participation, conservation, and development are in practice (Lawlor, Weinthal, & Olander, 2010).

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