

**The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in
Building Broad-Based Support for
Environmental Conservation and
Facilitating Efficient Governance
in Ecuador**

by

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Introduction

As defined by Weaver *et al.* (1997), two major goals in building broad-based sustainable development are 1) increasing effective governance and democracy and 2) protecting the environment. In recent years, a proliferation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has brought new perspectives and strategies to development in Latin America (Bebbington *et al.* 1993; Clark 1991; Meyer 1993). NGOs play major roles in increasing governance and supporting conservation (Price 1994; Weaver *et al.* 1997). By cooperating with the government and working to have a say in policy decisions, NGOs are increasing democracy in Latin America. Much of the conservation work undertaken by NGOs in Latin America has centered on environmental education and increasing access to natural lands (Eyre 1990; Meyer 1993). This paper will examine the role of NGOs and access to natural lands in building broad-based support for environmental conservation and their effect on increasing democracy in Latin America.

Historically, development and environmental protection have been viewed as incompatible goals. This view was generated by the definition of development as solely economic in nature. Recently, the goal for many developing countries has turned to environmentally sustainable development. (Weaver *et al.* 1997) Most NGOs focus on fostering local participation to ensure that local people benefit from development (Bebbington *et al.* 1993). One example is illustrated when NGOs assist local groups to integrate public conservation projects into local development goals.

Domestic environmental NGOs help local peoples become more involved with protected land planning and management to ensure the long term success of both the residents and the parks (Bebbington *et al.* 1993; Kaus 1993; Brechin & West 1990). Strengthening conservation projects and making them more democratic aids local people in making their voices and concerns heard by policy makers. Working with NGOs to aid local peoples, governments build legitimacy by creating methods through which people without affluence or political power can have access to policy makers.

This paper briefly examines the role of a domestic NGO, Fundación Natura (Natura), and Ecuador's second most visited park, Bosque Protector Pasochoa (Pasochoa), in building broad-based support for conservation in Ecuador. I will examine how Natura's activities are influential in increasing effective governance and democracy in Ecuador. Also, I will focus on the role that Pasochoa plays in creating broad-based support for environmental conservation. The discussion will show how these factors may work together to have a profound role on political change in Ecuador.

Background Information

Broad-Based Support and Environmental Conservation

Effective governance, defined by Weaver *et al.* (1997:2), includes respect for human rights, a healthy civil society of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), an increasingly democratic society, and a competent and accountable government. Past development strategies have focused on the accumulation of material affluence and assumed an unlimited resource base. This method of development has not only benefited an elite group of individuals but has brought about massive environmental degradation. These affects have not gone unnoticed though. Current development strategies currently focus on environmentally sustainable development, "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Weaver *et al.* 1997:34).

It is important to note that no country has yet to create a successful program of sustainable development; regions and particular projects have had arguable success, but even the most developed of nations still practice a form of development that is far from sustainable (Weaver *et al.* 1997). Although the goal may seem daunting the prospects and demands to transform development practices are increasing daily, and an enormous amount of research focuses on sustainable development (Bebbington *et al.* 1993; Norgaard 1988; Redclift 1994; Weaver *et al.* 1997).

For sustainable development to be successful, Weaver *et al.* (1997) argues that broad-based support is essential. Broad-based support relies on legitimacy rather than patronage systems of governance. If the public does not believe that a law has been created in their best interest or with the interests of the nation in mind, the government will lose legitimacy. This does not mean that legitimacy is given by all members of society equally. Legitimacy may be the primary source of support from the elite while the rural poor are governed through force. Governments strive to control the state through legitimacy as it is the most stable, reliable, and cost effective method. As some groups accept the legitimacy of the government, it must work to bring other groups into the same stage of governance in order to continue creating stronger support.

Fundación Natura

Natura was created in 1978 by a group of 43 Ecuadorians and has grown to be the largest NGO in the country. The idea for Natura was started in Ecuador's Department of National Parks and Wildlife, a department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG). Natura recruits its members through a number of advertising and public outreach campaigns. In 1989, there were approximately 6,000 members, 50 percent from Quito. Natura has maintained a high profile in both national and international circles and in 1989 was the recipient of Ecuador's first debt for nature swap, sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) (Meyer 1993).

Bosque Protector Pasochoa

Pasochoa was established in 1982 by the MAG. The 320 hectares of unique Andean primary forest is approximately 45 kilometers southeast of the capital of Quito. The land was previously owned by the Ministry of Public Health and did not sustain any local groups (Arreaza 1996, Meyer, 1993, Perrault 1994). The park grounds do contain three *acequias*, irrigation canals, which are used by local farmers to irrigate their fields. Pasochoa staff allows the bi-annual maintenance of the *acequias*, thus maintaining pre-park use by local groups.

Pasochoa is run by Fundación Natura. In 1981, Dr. Fernando Ortiz Crespo, then Director of the Department of Biological Sciences of La Universidad Católica in Quito, approached Natura with the idea of creating Pasochoa. When Pasochoa was established by the MAG in 1982, Fundación Natura was given the responsibility of managing the reserve. (Perrault 1994)

Discussion

Parks in Latin America

Although many local groups see the need to find sustainable solutions to their economic woes, they also must feed their children and pay the debts (Fernandez 1989). Most common lands in Latin America are rich in natural resources and have little or no protection. Although the government has taken the responsibility to create official common lands, such as parks, they often are without funding to provide protection or management (Eyre 1990). Without protection, and their boundaries known only scarcely even to law makers, these types of commons are called “paper parks.” Local peoples are under tremendous pressure to exploit these lands from growing economic and political tensions. Local peoples, who often traditionally relied on lands converted to parks, are left economically, socially, and culturally destitute.

“It is important not to divorce the environment from its parts, especially the human populations whose productive activities have contributed to its evolution (Redclift 1987:23).” The Northern concept of parks excludes human usage of the natural lands, it assumes an adversarial relationship between human beings and nature. In 1969, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defined national parks as,

“a relatively large area (1) where one or several ecosystems are not materially altered by human exploitation and occupation, where plant and animal species, geomorphological sites and habitats are of special scientific, educative, and recreative interest or which contains a natural landscape of great beauty, and (2) where the highest

competent authority of the country has taken steps to prevent or to eliminate as soon as possible exploitation or occupation in the whole area, and (3) where visitors are allowed to enter, under special conditions, for inspirational, educative, cultural, and recreative purposes” (IUCN 1971:13).

This definition, which has been the primary model for the establishment of national parks, reflects a view of nature that contradicts the reality of Latin America. The failure to integrate local peoples with conservation goals has resulted in disaster for conservation projects in Latin America (Eyre 1990).

The failure of the traditional model of national park has led scholars to call for a system of protected areas which better reflects the social and economic needs of the society rather than a strict protectionist view. In 1984, the IUCN revised its recommendations on the establishment of national parks with a ten-category system (Table 1) that establishes different rules of residence, access, and use for each category (IUCN 1984). The Ecuadorian government’s system of protected areas reflects a similar system (Table 2). Ecuador, through its system of protected areas, is attempting to address the goal of integrating conservation goals with local needs.

Pasocha represents the efforts of Ecuador to protect natural areas in one of the planet’s most ecologically diverse countries. Unfortunately, Ecuador has one of the highest deforestation rates in Latin America (Wilson 1992). Ecuador, in its National plan for Economic and Social Development 1989 - 1992, recognized deterioration of the environment and natural resources as one of the largest national problems (Fundación Natura 1992:24). Although Ecuador has officially protected more than 30% of its territory, most of those protected areas stand without any formal protection or management plans (Fundación Natura 1994).

National parks and protected lands play a vital role in the general education of environmental issues. The lack of funds for wildlands by most Latin American countries

makes both access and enjoyment of these natural resources difficult. This is why the Ecuadorian government has turned to Natura to manage its second most visited park, Bosque Protector Pasochoa.

According to Natura, there are four main objectives to the management of Pasochoa:

- protection of the primary forest,
- environmental education,
- scientific research, and
- recreation

The protection of the forest is maintained through environmental preventative-care education and a limited number of forest rangers. Pasochoa employs 15 guides whose primary role is public education through audiovisual presentations, guided hikes, games, activities, books, pamphlets, field guides, and a visitors center. (Perrault 1994 & 1996)

Pasochoa serves as a major education and recreation area for Quito. Boo (1990) and Perrault (1994) note that approximately 80 percent are Ecuadorians while the other 20 percent are international visitors (Figure 1). Sixty percent of visitors to Pasochoa are students in Quito who often return with their parents (Figure 2) (Boo 1990). Most visitors come for the day to have picnics or family outings. Other visitors are coming to see the wide variety of bird species that reside in the park. The park provides campgrounds and some cabins for use by those who want to stay overnight (Meyer 1993; Perrault 1994 & 1996).

Of particular interest is the increased access to natural land and environmental education that Pasochoa has brought to citizens of Quito. In Latin America, where an especially rich percentage of the world's biodiversity is located, a high percentage of the population has extremely limited access to wildlands. It has been estimated that 70 percent of the population in Latin America lives in urban areas. This is a relatively recent development, with most of the demographic change taking place over the past 40 years (Eyre 1990). The increased density of large portions of the population in relatively small urban areas reflects the industrialization on the region. When similar trends occurred in the

United States, there was a corresponding rise in interest for natural areas (Nash 1990). A similar response could be expected in Latin America in the coming years.

Pasochoa provides an ideal example of the advantages for the government and the nation to increasing access to natural lands. Through democratizing access to natural lands, by creating parks closer to urban areas or making entrance fees more economically feasible for all sectors of society, the advantages of international visitors and the elite are opened to the masses. Initially, this concept appears to reflect a patronage system of governance, but as the privilege of visiting natural areas becomes a "right," the protection of such areas is seen as protection for the people rather than the wealthy. This process provides legitimacy to governmental environmental conservation projects because the perceived privileges of the rich are converted to rational-legal arguments for the entire country. Most important to the process of building legitimacy, groups that may have been excluded from policy making are included in decisions that directly effect their lives.

The increased access also gives people a direct tie to natural areas. The areas are no longer commodities to be exploited by a few, but amenities to be enjoyed by all. The tragedy of the commons can be turned into the miracle of the commons. People who have been excluded from enjoying natural areas, once given access, may become advocates for the protection and creation of more natural areas. Historically, those with the least access to natural lands, are strong proponents for environmental protection, (i.e. east towards west in the United States, and Northern (developed) nations towards Southern (under-developed) nations).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

The focus of development research in recent years has been on the conflicting philosophies of "top-down" and "bottom-up." "Top-down" programs focus on centralized management and minimal local leadership. The justification of this system relies on the belief that development can only occur efficiently if run by skilled professionals. Most areas that are under development do not have the needed professionals, and therefore outsiders are used (Bebbington *et al.* 1993). Brechin and West (1990) note that "top-down"

programs are often prepared with a radically different value system than that of the people they affect.

“Bottom-up” strategies use local groups and individuals to advance development. Although this system is sometimes slower and may not move in the same direction as was originally planned, it usually does move in a direction more immediately beneficial to the participants. “Bottom-up” programs are designed around local needs and are flexible enough to handle unforeseen problems. (Bebbington *et al.* 1993; Brechin & West 1990, Brechin *et al.* 1991; Clark 1991)

The problems that plague “bottom-up” programs, such as inadequate funding, lack of technical expertise, and poor organization, are the same strengths of “top-down” systems. Brechin & West (1990:79) argue the need for “supportive coordinated linkage [between] top-down activities with those that are bottom-up.” Without cooperation, success is only measurable from one point of view and may be a failure from the other. By balancing the approaches of both systems, more true development progress may be made (Brechin & West 1990; Perrault 1994). Perrault (1996:174) stresses that it would be more beneficial for “researchers and practitioners to place less emphasis on diametric models of development and conservation management, and to look instead towards a means of incorporating viable aspects of both grassroots and centralized, “top-down” approaches.”

For decades, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been bridging barriers between local peoples and governments. In recent years though, the growth of NGOs has been notable (Bebbington *et al.* 1993; Clark 1991; Meyer 1993). Zimmerer (1990) highlights the causes of this movement which include a rise in frustration with traditional systems of development and local government’s inability or unwillingness to enact desired change. Numerous scholars (Bebbington *et al.* 1993; Clark 1991, Macdonald, Price 1994) note that NGOs are generally more efficient, more accountable to their constituents, more easily monitored, and less costly than the government. It is important to note that Weaver *et al.* (1997) sites the above factors as the primary goals to achieving good governance. It is likely that the increased support of NGOs in Latin

America is an indication of donor satisfaction with NGO methods versus governmental ones.

Local NGOs take a vital role in Latin America as an intermediary for international and national interest groups to make their voices heard and felt (Price 1994). Price notes that by “combining the goal of environmental stewardship with economic needs of the poor”, Latin American environmental groups have been able to attract participants who were previously uninterested in ecological issues” (1994). As NGOs attract a more diverse constituency, they gain political power in the form of democratic voice. By encouraging activism and education among its members, the NGO makes environmental concerns more evident to the elected policy makers and the public.

NGOs have both economical and political advantages to building broad-based support. The NGO is less likely to find itself financially strained if it has a diverse group of donors to draw upon when the NGO needs to modify its position on particular issues. Natura is a good example of this strategy. Natura is the largest NGO in Ecuador, drawing support from national, international, public, and private sources. Natura is the sole environmental NGO in Ecuador not to call for stopping oil production in the Amazon region of Ecuador. Even after numerous spills and studies by scientists indicating the immense environmental damage caused by drilling companies, Natura sides with the government in believing that the damage must be stopped, but the oil production, responsible for much of Ecuador’s development, should be allowed to continue (Meyer 1993). Such a position on environmental issues is likely to alienate a portion of an environmental NGO’s supporters. Due to Natura’s broad-based support, they have been able to survive the departure of many donors and continue to work on increasing conservation awareness in Ecuador (Meyer 1993). By maintaining a diverse membership, they are able to remain flexible, and this partially accounts for their success and longevity.

Environmental conservation and preservation have been the focus of many NGOs in recent years. Unfortunately, researchers note that the majority of conservation and preservation projects primarily act without the cooperation of local groups and without

consideration of national and local developmental goals (Bebbington *et al.* 1993; Meyer 1993; Price 1994; Southgate & Whitaker 1994). Pearce (1988) discusses how developing countries see their natural resources as a means to development and how their main strategy with respect to the environment has been utilitarian in nature.

Although some argue that Natura's position on petroleum exploitation reflects their allegiance to governmental agencies (Meyer 1993), I argue that their willingness to work with the government to integrate goals of conservation and development augments their ability to influence change in national environmental policy. The often-adversarial positions of reformers and government can create opposition to compromise (Fernandez 1989). By working with the government, Natura has placed itself in the position to have a voice in policy matters. By allowing outside voices to be heard the government increases its legitimacy among constituents. As the government allows other voices to be considered when drafting policy, more voices will want to be heard and the door opened by Natura will not be easily closed.

Broad-based support is vital for the longevity and stability of an NGO. This is also true of governments and development strategies; NGOs play an integral role in building this type of support. As NGOs work with the government and private groups to integrate conservation goals and development strategies, they are assisting in the creation of broad-based environmental support for conservation. By building a wider base, it is more likely that movements against environmentally oriented legislation or policies will be met with resistance.

Bosso (1997:65) notes that interest groups in the United States have discovered that while the "green lobby can probably repulse legislative efforts it opposes, it has had little success in building support for its own reforms or policy ideas." Although this may be true for Ecuador in the future, today Latin America faces the problem of having little or no representation in the creation of legislation besides that of business and labor interests (Crisp 1996). Although today's environmental NGOs may have little success of affecting

environmental legislation, those that open the government to outside perspectives are vital for increasing effective governance.

Conclusion

By examining Fundación Natura and Bosque Protector Pasochoa in Ecuador, the functions of NGOs and parks in creating stronger systems of governance and broad-based support for environmental legislation is more evident. NGOs are not only vital to the government as a method of fulfilling policy objectives, as Natura does for the National Park Service, but they also function as forces of change to increase democratic rule in Latin America. Parks, specifically access to natural areas, increase local peoples' ties to the natural areas and their potential for use as amenities rather than commodities. The cooperation between local peoples, NGOs, and governments to integrate national and local conservation projects with development is vital for the success of all participants. More importantly, the policy of cooperation is strengthening the legitimacy of governments in Latin America. By relying on legitimacy, more than force or patronage systems, the potential for long term stability and growth in Latin America is greatly increased. Without governmental stability, the prospects for sustainable development are slim.

Tables

Table 1: Ten IUCN Categories of Protected Areas

I.	Scientific Reserve / Strict Nature Reserve
II.	National Park
III.	Natural Monument / Natural Landmark
IV.	Nature Conservation Reserve / Managed Nature Reserve / Wildlife Sanctuary
V.	Protected Landscape or Seascape
VI.	Resource Reserve
VII.	Natural Biotic Area / Anthropological Reserve
VIII.	Multiple Use Management Area / Managed Resource Area
IX.	Biosphere Reserve
X.	World Heritage Site (Natural)

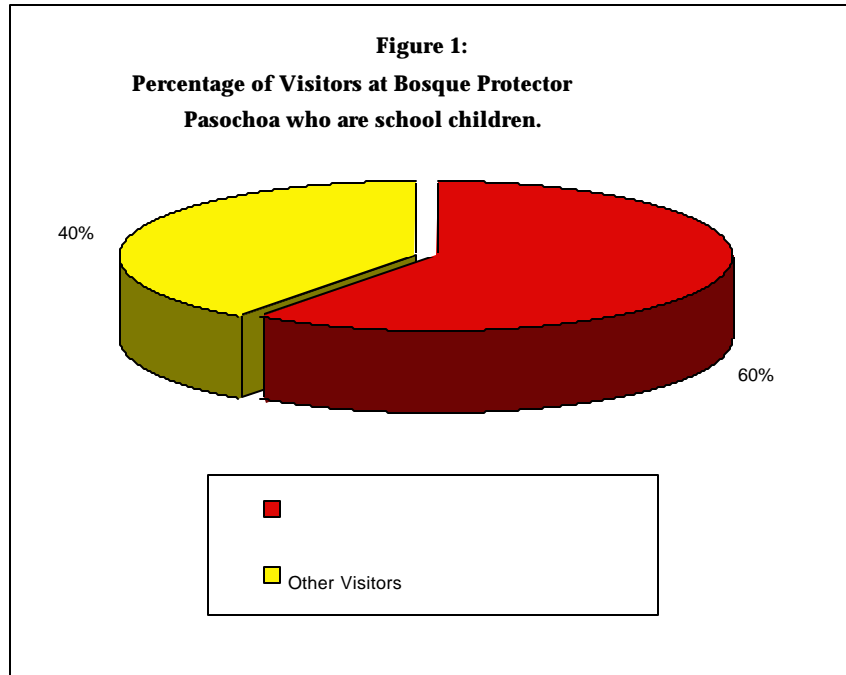
(IUCN 1984)

Table 2: Seven Ecuadorian Categories of Protected Areas

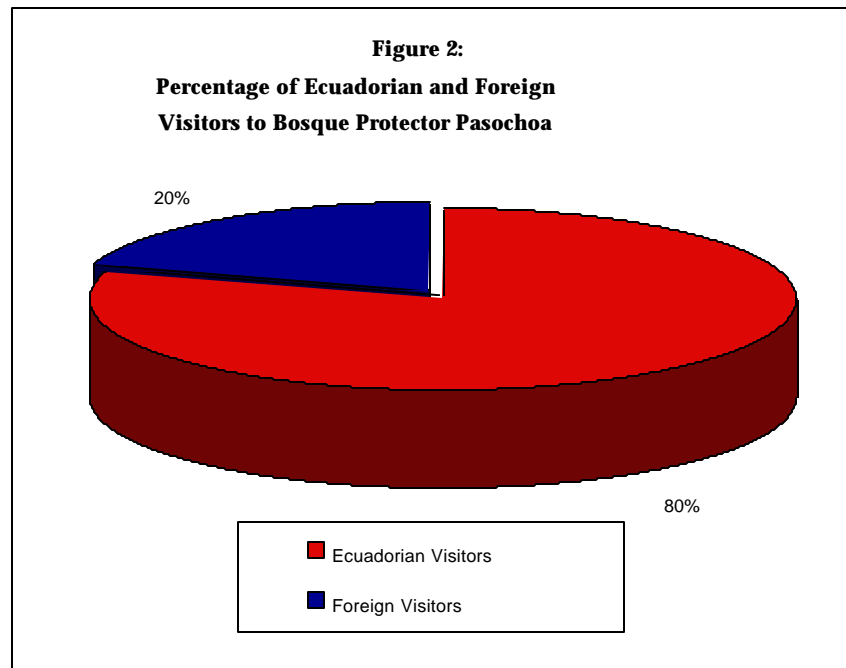
I.	National Park
II.	Ecological Reserve
III.	Wildlife Refuge
IV.	Biological Reserve
V.	National Recreation Area
VI.	Fauna Reserve
VII.	Hunting and Fishing Area

(Fundación Natura 1992, translated by author)

Figures



(Boo 1990:90)



(Boo 1990:90; Perrault 1994)

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