



## **Changing elites, institutions and environmental governance**

### **Analytical Framework Report**

#### **D.3.1**

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## 1. Introduction

Since colonial times, the differentiation of the social, political and economic elites from the rest of the population in Latin America has been intimately connected to the control that the former groups have exerted over natural resources. The elites' control over land, metals, water, oil and gas has been equally important as their control over labor in order to be able to dominate societies and state apparatuses (Coronil 1997). A further historical characteristic of Latin America is that this elite control has been intimately linked to the insertion of Latin America into the global economy as exporters of natural resources, and to the elite's cultural, ethnic and economic ties to foreign countries, companies and organizations. Thus, social conflicts in Latin America have in most cases had a triple edge: they have been about the distribution of economic resources, but equally about the control over natural resources and the values, culture and worldviews underlying the use of them (Escobar 2011).

Consequently, in spite of the existence of an elitist conservation movement, the struggles to protect the environment from over-exploitation and contamination have been closely related to struggles *against* local, national and transnational elites by indigenous peoples, small farmers, and other marginalized groups as well as middle class actors sympathizing with their cause (Carruthers, 2008). These struggles are also the focus of the great majority of studies of the governance of natural resources in Latin America often based on a political ecology approach, that tends to "privilege the rights and concerns (often livelihood-based) of the poor over those of powerful political and economic elites" (Bryant and Jarosz 2004, p. 808). This has led to a view on elites as representing the expansion of global capitalism in a rather homogenous manner. Moreover, a core but often implicit assumption of these studies is that there is a great deal of *elite continuity*. It follows that in order to understand the potential for change towards a more equitable and sustainable use of natural resources, one has to understand the organizational capacity and mobilization potential among non-elite groups.

While this may be perfectly justifiable on ethical, political as well as often on empirical grounds, the current situation in Latin America makes this "blackboxing" of elites problematic. With the so called "pink tide" of the last decade in Latin America, new groups have entered political power, many of whom have their background in movements that have firmly opposed the elite's dominance of the political system and control over natural and economic resources. Once in power, as a means to enable increased social spending and

expanded social services, some of these new governments have enacted policies to increase the production in key commodity sectors and strengthened the state control over them, and thus come under new criticism for overexploitation and destruction of natural resources (Gudynas 2010, García-Gaudilla 2009, Hogenboom and Fernández Jilberto 2009). Yet, many have also increased state presence and established new institutions, which in turn may produce new elites associated with state control over natural resources, in line with what happened in the 1960s and 1970s when the model of import substituting industrialization enabled the emergence of new governmental and business elites.

Whether there has actually been a shift in elites and what it means for environmental governance is a question that needs to be investigated in different national and local contexts. Thus, the main question guiding this study is: ***Has the entering of new, left of center governments signified a shift in environmental governance?*** And the main hypothesis pursued to explain different possible answers to that is ***that it depends on whether the shift in government is accompanied by a broader shift in the composition and actions of the elites.***

This research question and hypothesis urge first, a clear understanding of what is meant by elites and how to identify a shift in elites. In this paper, we propose ***a dynamic, relational, resource based model to the study of elites and their intention and ability to create and transform environmental governance leading towards a more sustainable and equitable use of natural resources.*** The “resource based” approach indicates that we view the elites as acquiring their position through the control over different resources. While economic (including natural) and political resources may be the most important, also social resources (networks) and discursive resources (knowledge) are of key importance. The term “dynamic” highlights the fact that although there is almost by definition an element of continuity and constants in the concept of elites, elites are changing through a variety of different processes. By “relational” we highlight the fact that elites cannot be understood without taking into account their relations with “non-elites” and indeed how this relationship is defined and may be redefined is a key marker of elites and elite change.

In the following, we will first elaborate on the role of elites in existing political ecology literature in Latin America. Second, we will elaborate the concept of elites and how this has been approached in the literature. Third, we will discuss factors that may have contributed to elite shift in Latin America, including changes in the global economic context, and political shifts. The final part is dedicated to an outline of the cases to be studied. These are all cases

of *environmental governance related to the development of a natural resource based economic sector of central importance*. Due to the differences in natural endowments and productive structures the cases concern a different sector in each country, focusing on agricultural rejuvenation in El Salvador, intensive soy production in Argentina, mining in Ecuador, and forestry in Brazil.

## **2. Environmental governance, political ecology and the “blackboxing” of elites**

One may identify two discourses and bodies of literature on the regulation of natural resources and the environment in Latin America. The first is the discourse of ***environmental governance***. Environmental governance may be defined as “a set of regulatory practices, processes, mechanisms and organizations through which political actors influence environmental actions and outcomes” (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006: 298). It describes processes of interaction among state actors (including various branches of governmental and regulatory agencies), and non-state actors (such as private companies and civil society organizations) including mechanisms such as co-management, private social partnerships and public private partnerships. Focusing on such mechanisms implies that no single agent possesses the capabilities to address the multiple facets, interdependencies and scales of environmental problems. It recognizes furthermore the independent role of institutions arguing that: “Key to different forms of environmental governance are the political-economic relationships that institutions embody and how these relationships shape identities, actions, and outcomes” (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006: 298). New forms of networks, public-private partnerships, participatory boards and other mechanisms are viewed as more *efficient* than hierarchical state policies, precisely because they shape identities, actions and outcomes in different ways. As for example Boyd (2008) argues, a process of such “adaptive governance” may build knowledge, feed ecological considerations into management processes and encourage successful management.

What is downplayed in many studies of environmental governance is thus the importance of the structural inequalities between actors participating in such mechanisms of governance (Piñeiro 2004, Walker 2007). Thus, a focus on *governance* has sometimes been contrasted to a focus on elites in the study of management of natural resources (Brannstrøm 2009). This is partly related to the fact that the term environmental governance emerges in the neo-liberal era (Baud, Castro and Hogenboom 2011) when management issues replaced a focus on

power and inequalities as the center of attention.

The broad group of writings within the field of *political ecology* on the other hand, takes such inequalities and power-relations as a point of departure. Indeed, with its origins in the impatience with apolitical approaches to environmental management as well as the lack of ecological perspectives in radical political economy, it engages profoundly with how structural inequalities at multiple levels produce environmental degradation, as well as our understanding of it and the solutions encountered to resolve it. Moreover, political ecology “accept[s] the idea that costs and benefits associated with environmental change are for the most part distributed among actors unequally...[...] which reinforces or reduces existing social and economic inequalities [...] which holds political implications in terms of the altered power of actors in relation to other actors” (Bryant and Bailey 1997,p. 28-9).

The many contributions to political ecology from Latin America draw heavily on their origins in neo-Marxism (Durand Smith et al. 2011), and often critically takes “Capitalism and its historical transformations [as] a starting point for any account of the destruction of nature” (Peet, Robbins and Watts 2010, p. 23). However, the political ecology of Latin America has also made major contributions to the understanding of the natural resource component of the conditions of coloniality and the construction of modernity (Leff 1986, Coronil 1997, Alimonda 2011) that forms the premises of current environmental movements and struggles. As argued by Alimonda: “since the Iberian conquest a diversity of regimes have governed nature, but the hegemonic and colonizing ones have been those that have ensured the governability and the production of values of change” (2011, p. 51).

Another main contribution from Latin America has been to include a cultural dimension in the study of environmental conflicts. This leads to the argument that the privileging of certain exploitative productive systems over others, which is the core reasons for the intertwined distributive and ecological conflicts in Latin America, is culturally determined, and these conflicts are thus not only been ecological and distributive as suggested by for example Joan Martínez Alier (2002) but also cultural (Escobar 2011).

In spite of its debt to neo-marxism and consequential structural inspiration, Latin American political ecology has been concerned with agency and particularly understanding the ideas, strategies and different articulations of socio-environmental movement resisting the dominating modes of production and governance (Rochelau 2008).

However, elites have largely been considered to be dependent on their location in structural

relations of domination. Their privileges derive from their positions in the structures that configure Latin America as a subaltern region that might be exploited and altered according to the needs of a globally integrated capitalism. The double exploitation of people and nature also forms the basis of the construction of the modern states, dominated by national elites. Thus, the states are not viewed as mediators between the different interests in environmental conflicts, but as expressions of the interests of global capitalist forces allied with local elites, applying various means and mechanisms to support the expansion of a global capitalist model from which it derives its economic basis, i.e., in the form of taxes, royalties etc. (Cardoso and Faletto 1979). Indeed, the embeddedness of the state in broader systems of control has led the attention away from formal state policies and towards general mechanisms of ensuring compliance with their general interests and purposes (Alimonda 2011, p.45).

In this context, elites have rightly been viewed as a part of the problem of social exclusion and environmental degradation. This is true in spite of the fact that the conservation boom in Latin America actually took place under predominant neoliberal governments in spite of frequent allegations against them of commodifying nature (Schmink and Jouv  -Mart  n 2011), largely due to the existence of an elitist conservation movement. Inspired by the global processes and initiatives abroad, this has been brought to the national agenda by NGOs, academic and official research institutes, or policy makers often linked to international organizations and more attuned to international intellectual currents than to the needs of the local populations (see e.g. Mumme et.al 1988, Nugent 2002). Consequently, this form of conservation has been criticized for failing to understand environmental issues in the context of the creation of livelihoods for marginalized groups (Holmes 2010). In fact, conservation has often been *opposed* by local populations dependent on the use of biological reserves for small-scale agriculture and grasslands.

As mentioned, assuming that elites will always essentially be mainly a part of the cause of inequality and environmental degradation is problematic in the current situation, where groups that have been on the barricades to oppose the elites in power, find themselves in power. Moreover, the fate of agendas for environmental protection and more sustainable production patterns of other actors, such as social movements, depends not only on their own ability to mobilize and articulate their demands, but crucially also on the elite's reaction to them. This situation urges a closer scrutiny of the elites and their attitudes and actions. This, in turn requires a more precise idea of the concept of elites.

### **3. Governing elites: who are they, and how do they change?**

Elites have directly and indirectly been treated in a plethora of different bodies of literature including the political economy literature, sociological, anthropological, and political science literature. In line with the main focus of this analysis, here we will be concerned with *governing elites*, understood as elites that directly or indirectly influence major political decisions. As has been emphasized in the broad body of elite-literature, this differs from *governmental* elites (elites controlling government) by encompassing broader societal elites, but how they should be defined, how they are sustained and how they may shift, differ. Crucial for us here is how and whether a change of elites happens, and if elite-shifts potentially leads to more egalitarian distributions of power and whether such elite-shifts may lead to new conceptions of the relationship between environmental protection and development and the use of natural resources.

A surprising number of studies that claim to speak about elites in plural fail to provide such clarification (Woods 1998, Smith 2005). A number of studies of Latin American elites rest on theories of political economy and a ***structural approach*** in which elites are (often implicitly) identified based on their relationship to capital and means of production. In the highly unequal and class divided societies in Latin America, the term elite is sometimes indeed used interchangeably with “the upper middle and upper classes”, as opposed to a concept of “popular classes”. In other cases, the term elite is used (mostly implicitly) as including business, landholding and political elites, considered to operate in close alliances, and often allied with global political-economic elites. This is the case with historical sociological literature on the role of the land holding elites, and their relations to industrial capital for example (Paige 1997, Torres-Rivas 1989), but also newer contributions that study elite constellations associated with regional and global configurations of ownership to capital (Robinson 2003, Meza et. al 2009). Interests and attitudes of the elites are essentially considered to be derived from their relationship to capital.

Elite shifts are considered to essentially to occur with shifts in modes of capital accumulation: spatially and sector-wise, that may produce divisions between different parts of the capitalist class, and it is such divisions that may provide openings for the major subject of history, namely the dispossessed classes to move history forwards. In Latin America three



major such shifts have occurred in recent history: the challenge to the dominance of the land-holding oligarchy posed by the industrial bourgeoisie in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of new groups of industrialists in the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century associated with the import substituting model, and the strengthening of a capital holding class associated with (often privatized) services (including banking, telecommunications, electricity, commerce, tourism, etc.) and natural resource based sectors and integrated into global circuits of accumulation associated with the neo-liberal shift in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These shifts produced partial and temporary divisions between agricultural and agro-industrial elites, and between these agro-based elites and industrial elites (Rueschemeyer, Stevens and Stevens 1992, Paige 1997). In addition there is always a possible contradiction between finance capital and productive capital. Recently it is increasingly a potential division between elites that are integrated into global circuits of accumulation, and nationally focused elites that have been of interest (Fernández Jilberto 2005).

These shifts partly came about as a consequence of changes in the global political economy, and partly due to shifts in state policies and the degree of state participation in the running of the economy. However, throughout the period, natural resource extraction, agriculture and commodity export never ceased to be of importance, and in some countries the groups investing in industries in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and later benefitted from entering into the formerly state owned service and natural resource based sectors often originate with the land holding classes. Thus a major focus of studies has been how capitalist through for example family businesses and alliances with other families have avoided major divisions between capital owners and ensured a degree of elite-continuation (Balmori, Voss and Vortman 1984, Paniagua 2001).

However, although frequently using the term elite, this approach does not actually dwell much on what the concept entails: indeed elite-studies as such are considered rather to emerge out of the contributions by Mosca, Mitchells and Pareto that were highly critical of the largely Marxist equation of elites with the dominant capitalist classes. These authors conceived of societies and organizations as inherently elitist and all groups in power as tending towards monopolization (Mosca 1939, Michels 1962). Yet, they also viewed elites as the main motors of change in society. Society moved forward as new elites dislocate old elites; thus it is regime circulation, not the construction of political subjects among the dispossessed classes that would lead to regime change (Pareto 1916, referred to in

Hartmann 2007).

Such elite studies inspired the seminal study of Latin American elites by Lipset and Solari (1967) that takes an explicit system-functional approach to the study of elites. Defining elites as the positions in society which are at the summits of key social structures, i.e. the higher positions in the economy, government, military, politics, religion, mass organizations, education, and the profession (Lipset and Solari, 1967, p.vii), they studied the values, skills and capabilities of political, economic, military, and labor elites and considering this as integrated parts of the societal system of a developing region. Such a multi-sector approach allows for understanding elite shifts as something that may occur through the ascendance of groups by way of different sets of organizations. For example, in Latin American history we have several examples of middle class groups ascending to power through the military apparatus that in turn have become major agents of social change (see e.g Lovemann 1999, Nunn 1986).

The study of the characteristics of elites was justified based on the assumption that these had a significant impact on decision making in the absence of the constraints of large-scale bureaucracies and mass political pressure such as those to be found in “modern” societies (Hart 1977). Thus one could not justify the kind of studies of the power elite like the one conducted in the “developed countries” after the pioneering study by C. Wright Mills (1956) of elites in the United States. With the evolution of democracy and state apparatuses in Latin America, such an assumption does no longer hold. Thus, whereas the classics (e.g. Mosca) regarded universal suffrage and parliamentarism as unable to dissolve the principle that an “organized minority” is able to “impose its will on a disorganized majority” (Mosca 1939, p. 154), the strengthening of democratic institutions has given rise to a number of studies focusing on parliamentary elites and other elites emerging from their relations to the formal democratic institutions (see e.g. Alcántara Sáez 1995, 2008). These institutions have in turn allowed from previously marginalized groups to ascend to power and possibly to become new governing elites. Second, the strengthening of bureaucracies and groups of experts associated with them, has led to studies of technocratic elites as major governing elites (See e.g., Ai Camp 2002, Montecinos 1996, Joignant and Güell 2011).

In this study we will attempt to bridge the approaches above. Starting from a general anthropological approach we define elites as: Groups that control specific resources by means of which they acquire political power and material advantage (Pina-Cabral, 2000, p. 2), and may control the distribution of these resources in their locale (Marcus 1998). Building

on this we argue that governing elites are:

- *Groups of individuals that due to their economic resources, expertise/knowledge, social networks, or positions in political or other organizations stand in a privileged position to influence in a formal or informal way decisions and practices with key environmental implications.*

This definition allows for the recognition that elites are situated in economic and social structures, but it also allows for a degree of agency and elite shifts. Furthermore, it recognizes that in a given social context there may be competing elites that control of different kind of interlinked resources.

This means that elites are more than classes: Control over economic resources, i.e. finance capital, means production, land and natural resources are of key importance, but control over these resources may occur through other means than ownership and may depend on political resources, networks and expertise/knowledge. Control over economic resources is a possible means to acquire political positions and influence, but that depends on the nature of existing formal and informal political institutions.

The importance of organization has been a key focus of elite studies since Mosca. Control over organizations and institutions are a key resource that may contribute to defining elites. However, acquiring such control may depend on networks, economic resources and knowledge/expertise, and thus, the different kind of resource should not be analyzed separately. Linking the different kinds of resources also reminds us that although, according to Michels any organization has an elite, this does not necessarily imply that any organizational elite can be considered part of the governing elite; that depends on the kind of political, economic and other resources that the organization control.

Control over economic and political resources depend to a significant degree on existing institutions and economic structures. The final two kinds of resources that we emphasize here do so to a less degree. The first is networks, whether local, regional, national or transnational, including family ties, social networks, professional networks, or networks formed related to specific (political) issues. The establishment of networks partly depends on social structures, but depends also on agency, and may be formed as a means to keep control over specific resources, but also as a means to oppose such control or advocate alternative forms of organizing the economy, society and politics. Such networks may also connect different kinds of elites, for example economic elites and political elites (Silva 1996,

Bull 2007).

Second, knowledge/expertise has several functions in the distinction of an elite as well as the kind of influence exercised. A group of experts may acquire an elite position due to their particularly valued knowledge in a specific field (the most well-known case of this from Latin-America is clearly the role of the neo-classical economists in the neo-liberal transformation, (see e.g. Montecinos 1996). Yet, a particular kind of know-how may also be a main means of acquiring control over economic resources, as well as the “marker” of a social elite. Furthermore, knowledge may be converted into discursive resources and thus a means of political influence. In certain areas, very specialized knowledge is required to master the language of a certain field, and those possessing such specialized knowledge tend to dominate the setting of agendas and lead institutions and organizations related to the topic at hand, as is clearly visible in the case of climate change.

This approach allows for a discussion of elites at different levels: the local and the national, but also – important for the cases studied here – it may include actors such as transnational companies that acquire different resources in a specific national or local context.

It should be underlined that this approach is necessarily eclectic: it builds partly on the post-structuralist model developed by Woods (1998), but the categories sketched above rest on a variety of different underlying concepts of power and influence. The resources may be used to influence outcomes in a variety of ways: shaping discourses through the control of media, knowledge institutions, etc., pressuring for direct policy changes, controlling actions through withholding or promising economic rewards, etc. These processes are among those to be studied here.

#### **4. Non-elites, elite shifts and a sustainable and equitable development**

A major motive for studying elites has been to understand continuities of inequality and differentiation. Thus, much anthropological literature has focused on processes of succession (see for instance Pina-Cabral & Lima, 2000), and the Marxist oriented studies have focused on the persistence of global capitalist structures to explain, for example, why societal change does not occur in spite of national policy changes. However, the political shifts that occurred in Latin America in the first decade of the 2000s, provide a fascinating scenario for studying different facets of elite change. These political shifts have so far mainly

been studied as processes emerging “from below” (Silva 2009). Indeed the turn to the left has been interpreted partially as the result of social uprisings against the neo-liberal economic model implemented across the continent from the 1980s, and against elitist democracies that continued mainly to represent the groups that had exploited the peoples and the nature of Latin America for centuries. An important aspect of the protests was also opposition against the exploitation and unjust distribution of natural resources.

Yet, the economic and political transformations occurring have also involved the emergence of new governance elites that have appeared to distinguish themselves from the social movements from which they emerged (Bull 2012). Indeed, many governments that previously have enjoyed support from grass roots movements, have later disqualified them or consciously attempted to co-opt them (Zibechi 2010, Bowen 2011a). The current transformation thus provides a fertile ground to study issues that are at the core of the elite-literature: whereas there is general agreement that there will always be elites in a society, there is much less agreement about the extent to which these may change over time, and whether elites shifts may mean a change in the concentration of resources and power or the extent to which elites may be willing and able to create more equal economic and political structures. As concluded by Rovira: “... elites have always existed and will always exist, but it is not possible to determine beforehand how they are composed or what kind of social steering they put into practice, nor, even less, for how long they stay in power” (Rovira 2011).

We will be interested mainly in two key aspects of the actions of new elite. First, we will focus on the relationship that these develop to the diversity of non-elite groups.<sup>1</sup> Such relations may range from oppression and exclusion to co-optation, and dialogue. The relations may be ad-hoc and dependent on the will of elites, or they may be institutionalized. Whereas history is full of examples of elite repression and exclusion, there are also examples of dialogue and institutionalization leading to a more equitable distribution of resources. In Europe the neo-corporatist model implemented in the period after WWII between political and organizational elites enabled also a re-distribution of economic resources (Crouch and Streeck 2006). But more equitable distribution of political resources may also be the result of elite compromises: Major studies of the processes of democratization in the 1970s and 1980s in Latin-America focused for example on the compromises reached between different

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<sup>1</sup> As anthropological critics contend, applying the term “elite” to any one group is just as crude and homogenizing as applying the term “peasant” or any other generalizing concept that holds little unless its content is defined relationally (Hart 2002, Shore 2002, Herzfeld 2000).

elites including the military, bureaucratic elites, traditional economic elites and new business elites as prerequisites for the establishment of democratic institutions which in turn potentially distributed power and influence more equally (e.g., O'Donnell et al., 1986). So far we have scarce information about whether the emergence of new groups in power will signify a more equal distribution of political influence and economic resources, through for example the establishment of new institutions. This will be among the main questions asked in this study.

The second and closely related aspect what relationship possible new elites will develop to natural resources. As argued above, economic and governing elites have historically been defined partly through their control over natural resources, yet historically in Latin-America elites that have ascended through the military institutions, the bureaucracy or industry have competed with the elites that have gained their position based on exploitation of natural resources and landownership. Today we also see new elites ascending by means of their positions in social movements and political parties as well as transnational corporations, international organizations and other structures. The attitudes related to environmental issues of these alternative elites may depend on their knowledge/expertise, networks as well as particular organizational platform or economic interests.

Yet, considering the elites that have recently gained governmental power, we will not be able to understand their attitudes and actions related to the environment only by focusing on “where they come from” (social movements, transnational companies, etc.). We must also take into account the dynamics studied further in the work package that intend to historicize elites (Work Package 2): namely the double imperative of ensuring short-term electoral support and strengthening the long term processes of state-building. Both imperatives require access to economic resources a matter which requires the ability to tax general economic activities but also specifically natural resource extraction (royalties). And, in many cases the more resources extracted, the more funds will be available for distributional programs that may provide short term electoral support, and the more funds for the building of state capacity that in turn also may enhance the capacity to tax non-natural resource based economic sectors. This double imperative does in most cases mean that the new governmental elites will face strong opposition from old and new economic elites that may increasingly organize outside the formal power structures if they perceive their interests as sufficiently threatened (Bowen 2011b). How the reaction to such opposition is balanced against the reaction to groups opposing resource extraction on grounds of social justice and environmental concerns, and the need to increase state

resources will be at the crux of the potential for the evolution of sustainable and equitable environmental governance in the future.

## **5. Studying shifts in environmental governance**

The study of the new elites in Latin America and their relation to environmental governance should thus start from a study of the degree to which there has been a shift in the control of different kinds of resources, and the means used to control those. This will be followed by a study of the relationship between possible new elites and “old elites”. The subsequent part will be to study their actions related to environmental governance of a sector of economic importance. Such actions may be studied through three lenses.

### **5.1. Main development model pursued**

The kind of development model that different new elites are supporting may be the strongest indicator of the inclination of the priority given to environmental issues. This may be based heavily on the extraction of natural resources or it may be focused on seeking alternatives to these. The development model has significant implications for the ascendance to “elite status” for certain groups and for the ability of elites to reproduce themselves. It also has deep implications for the very divisions between elites and non-elites.

### **5.2. Establishment of institutions/laws of environmental governance**

The second action to study will be the extent to which institutions for environmental governance has been established. These may be laws regulating the use of natural resources for a specific economic purpose, establishment of ministries, or other governmental institutions, or multi-actor governance bodies. At the more general level it may be constitutional changes with environmental implications, such as those enacted by the current governing bodies of Ecuador and Bolivia.

### **5.3 Relation to institutions/laws of environmental governance**

Operating partly in weakly institutional environments, it is not necessarily the case that institutions of environmental governance will modify extensively the existing development model. Whether the elites respect and use, or rather ignore, bend, or bypass such institutions is a matter of empirical research. For example, as has been shown in the case of



Ecuador, in spite of the protection that the constitution gives to nature, this is partly contradicted by other paragraphs in the constitution and frequently violated by the national political elites (Jameson 2010).

In studying these processes we will ask:

- 1) How do the new elites relate to the demands of the “non-elites”?
- 2) How do the new elites relate to the demands of the “old elites”?
- 3) What discourses, priorities and demands regarding environmental policies have these expressed?
- 4) What can explain their priorities and demands? (Sustaining privileges, acquiring material benefits, changing ideologies and beliefs, etc.)
- 5) To what extent have environmental aspects of such policies been changed through the interaction with opposing elites?

This is assumed to be affected by a combination of:

- 1) Elite composition: Have there been a change in the composition of economic elites due to structural changes? Have new elites entered (based on their knowledge/expertise, networks, position in organizations, etc.)?
- 2) Elite practices and identity formation: How is the discourse and actions by the elites influenced by their practices to sustain the elites as such? What role does nature/the environment play in such practices? Have they changed in any way?
- 3) Elite networks: How do different elites relate to each other? Have the relations between elites changed?

## **6. The case studies**

The main focus of this WP will be *environmental governance of economic sectors of key importance*. The focus of the study will be on the elite discourses and actions related to the environmental governance of such sectors. Environmental governance may refer to environmental plans, policies and laws, but also new institutions such as local environmental councils, or public-private boards. It is important to include also initiatives not only by environmental ministries or agencies but also by other key departments with impact on the dominating economic activities, including ministries of economy, finance, planning, etc.



Our intention is not to study elites as such, but rather the way elites influence the priority given to the environment in the formulation and implementation of development strategies. This is assumed to require an understanding of the composition of elites (based on what kind of resources they base their position as elites), their discourse on environment/development, how elites defend their positions and interact with other elites as well as non-elite groups. Due to the salience of the latter issue, one part of the study will be a cross-country study of elite reaction to popular mobilization for sustainable resource extraction practices. This part will intend to understand how the composition and change (or lack of such) of the elites can contribute to explain differences in elite reaction across different countries. It will include selected cases from Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela and Brazil.

The case-studies will function as pique-holes into both the sector of choice and ideally enable us to identify certain broader tendencies in the environmental governance of each country and the degree to which it is shaped by its elites. Furthermore, it may enable a degree of comparison across sector and borders.

### **6.1 Economic and political shifts in different parts of Latin America**

In terms of economic shifts, the Latin American countries are currently going through different transformations related to multi-layered structural changes. Although with markedly different expressions and results, Latin America passed through a neo-liberal transformation from the 1980s to the 2000s that brought about a partial transformation of the economic elites, establishing ties to transnational companies, organizations or networks, and a reduction of the previous influence of industrialists that had benefitted from ISI-policies as well as in some cases, the land-owning classes. The neo-liberal transformation had different expressions in different contexts and this has led to very differing starting points for meeting the challenges and making use of the opportunities of the current global transformation. Put generally, in Mexico and Central America the neo-liberal era set off a transformation away from traditional agricultural production and towards light industry (mainly maquila), non-traditional exports (such as shrimp, melon, cardamom, ornamental flowers) and sectors benefitting from the large flows of remittances and (to a less extent) tourism, mainly services and commerce. This transformation was encouraged by reduction in subsidies, trade and investment liberalization and integration (particularly with the United States through NAFTA and DR-CAFTA) and large scale privatization schemes. In the Central American countries, an additional factor was the different results of land reform and civil war. In El Salvador for example, the combination of these two factors led to a dramatic drop in the production of traditional agricultural products (coffee and cotton) (Segovia 2002, Rosa

2010). The consequence of this has been a shift among the dominant economic elites from those emerging from the agro-export sectors towards those with their basis in services, commerce, construction and finance, all benefitting from large inflows of remittances (Bull 2011). Politically, the different parts of the dominant economic sectors have been closely united.

The productive structure that resulted from this transformation has rendered Central America and Mexico particularly vulnerable to two current changes in the global economy: the rise of China as a main industrial producer and purchaser of commodities, and the crisis in the US economy. The first of these processes reduced competitiveness of the Mexican and Central American industry, while the second has led to a contraction in their main market for goods (the United States) and a reduction of remittances. Competitive agri-business and extractive industries do exist in some countries and areas (in Central America, particularly Guatemala and Honduras), but the scale of it is miniscule compared to what we find in South America.

The history of resource extraction and export-agriculture has caused significant environmental challenges in Central America, such as deforestation and soil and water contamination. Moreover, the geography of Central American has rendered it particularly vulnerable to the effects of global climate changes. However, the economic transformation described above, that included the reduction of historically dominant agro-exports, has led to a regeneration of forest-cover and ecosystems in parts El Salvador (Hecht et. al 2006). The main current challenge in Central America is to create livelihoods for the local populations that are sustainable and resilient faced with climatic changes.

The challenges in South America are quite different. Abundant with land and natural resources, it has benefitted generously from global structural changes, including the rising commodity prices and increased demand for metals, fuels (fossil and biofuels), and key agricultural products such as soybeans. Yet, this also has many more particular local expressions and the resulting composition of elites depends as well on a number of local processes. In Ecuador, for example, the political shift occurring with the entering of the government of Rafael Correa in 2008, must be understood on the background of a longer term economic transformation fed by global structural changes as well as national policy shift. Between 1964 and 1994, a modest land reform was enacted with minimal effects on the livelihood of the poor, but which resulted in the disappearance of the old hacienda system and thus to the dominance of the old landowning elite. What appeared instead were

large, modern capitalist agricultural properties oriented towards exports or the upper layers of the local markets run by new agri-business elites, that later became closely involved in (and benefitting from) governmental policies in the conversion to the globally dominant neo-liberalism. This process in turn was supervised by modernizing, technocrat elites in the state-apparatus fuelled by oil money that pursued a homogenizing, modernizing nation-building project. However, a further effect of the land reform process was the establishment of a new indigenous elite, representing large, organized indigenous groups and benefitting from the institutional reforms towards democracy in the 1990s. As a combined result of this mobilization, and the economic crisis (1998-2002) and the political instability (1997-2006), the legitimacy of the old technocrat elite as well as the old economic elite weakened and it paved the way for a broad coalition of forces (in the Alianza Pais party) pursuing a plurinational, counter-neoliberal Project of modernization. This is also the group that has proposed the strategy of finding a post-oil platform for development in Ecuador. However, the main proposal to end the oil-dependence of the Ecuadorean economy is to emphasize mining – a new field opening for a variety of conflicts over the environmental impact and use of natural resources (Andrade 2011).

In Brazil, the discovery of huge oil reserves has had the effect that old industrial and agribusiness elites have been joined by elites associated with Petrobras and other major oil companies (Sawyer 2011). Another elite rising, are politicians on state-level, more specifically governors. In 1998, the federal state lay much of the responsibility for forest policies in the hands of the states directly during a wave of decentralization. Now, as new revenues have arisen in the Amazonia – through increased agribusiness (both grains, soy and cattle), and potentially are arising, through initiatives such as REDD+, paired with the changes in the political landscapes of Brazil – i.e. the pink tide, most famously headed by former president Lula da Silva and his Workers Party (hereafter PT). The effect on the environmental policies performed will be studied through especially a study of the state Acre, and, as comparative cases, in brief the states of Mato Grosso, Amazonia, and Pará.

In Chile, a layer of well-educated business managers associated with agro-export activities and transnational capital has gained influence in policy processes at the expense of old industrialists and agri-business leaders (Bull 2008). In Argentina, where agribusiness is the sector in which the most prominent elites have their basis, environmental regulation of the soy sector has been low. The increase in use of genetically modified soya especially poses challenges both nature and human living conditions; the use of pesticides to avoid ploughing and low regulation has moved “the agricultural border” deeper into areas not formerly used,

or sees as apt for, agricultural production, consequentially availing smaller areas for cattle ranching and thus deteriorating the quality of meat and dairy produce, whilst forcing people to abandon land that until recently was used for small-scale agriculture and habitual purposes.

## **6.2 Shifting elites and institutions in environmental governance in four cases**

### *Agricultural reactivation in El Salvador*

El Salvador has gone from being an economy heavily dependent on the production of coffee and a few other agro-export crops to being a service based economy essentially dependent on remittances and, to a less extent, *maquila* industry for income, while importing most of its food and consumer goods. Its public policies have over the last years been focused on trade and investment liberalization and it has encouraged urbanization in order to foster economic growth in a service based economy. The combination of these policies has caused a crisis of traditional agriculture and an increase in rural poverty, further aggravated by the general economic crisis experienced by the country. However, Salvadoran agriculture is not only affected by the economic crisis; being for years severely affected by deforestation it is now also victim to severe effects of climate change. In 2009, the first government supported by the former left wing guerilla FMLN gained power after nearly two decades of right-wing rule by the business-dominated ARENA party. The FMLN supported government of President Mauricio Funes, has initiated plans to reactivate the agricultural sector. However, the reactivation of the agricultural sector enters directly into rural conflicts with long historical roots between on the one hand, small-holders claiming better access to land, credit, and markets, and security for land-titles, and on the other hand, old agricultural elites, now diversified into tourism, bio-fuels and logistical services that argue for the need to modernize Salvadoran agriculture to make use of these external market opportunities (Cuellar et. al 2006).

This case study will focus on national and regional elites, how they have changed and what actions they have taken related to the agricultural sectors along the three lines sketched above. It will focus particularly on the relative importance of the observed transition of the economic elite in terms of their economic focus and their dependence on natural resources (Bull 2011), the possible ascendance of new elites based on the control of other kinds of resources, their discourses and networks.

The analysis will be made both at the national level and at the level of the region Bajo

Lempa. Bajo Lempa was traditionally an area of production of cotton, cattle and sugarcane, situated at the delta of the river Lempa. During the El Salvadorean civil war (1980-1992) it was an area partly controlled by the guerrilla movement, and the site of combat. Consequently, it was abandoned by large part of its population, and the traditional economic activities declined. This has led to a certain recuperation of the forest cover, as well as improvement of the water quality after years of contamination from the cotton and sugar production. With the peace accords groups of the population was repopulated collectively in the 1990s. This accentuated the need for finding new livelihoods for the returned population. Among the solutions found has been ecological farming, and the natural resources have been governed by local multi-actor governing boards. However, the area is under constant threat by environmental as well as economic forces: situated at the river mouth of Lempa, it experiences frequent flooding due to the regular hurricanes that have increased in frequency and strength with climatic changes over the last years (Cuellar, et. al 2011). It is also under constant threat from local and international economic elites that seek new areas for crops such as African Palm and sugarcane. The main question is how new political elites relate to these economic elites and how they balance their demands with the interests of the re-settled small farmers and environmental sustainability.

### **The new politics of mining in Ecuador: towards a post-extractivist model?**

The Ecuadorean economy and state building has been and is deeply dependent on the income from natural resource extraction. The neo-liberal governments of the 1980s and 1990s were successful in their attempts to modernize and develop the primary-export sector managed by domestic and transnational companies, in the context of rising oil and mineral prices. This increased the presence of transnational companies specialized in natural resources exploitation and made the economy firmly geared towards the world economy. The neo-liberal policies faced deep criticism for its lack of environmental sustainability, for ignoring the claims of indigenous peoples and for its lack of social inclusion. In 2006 the left-leaning government of Rafael Correa of the *Alianza País* (PAIS, or AP) won the elections based on an ideology assimilating a great deal of the environmental demands and rhetoric created by the indigenous and ecologist movements to oppose the neoliberal discourse of the national elites and the transnational mining and oil companies. Aided by the financial collapse of 1998-2000, the renewed oil boom of 2002 onwards, and the destruction of the electoral capacities of the right, the new Ecuadorian government has brought in a new modernizing elite. Starting his mandate with a process of rewriting the constitution that established a plurinational state and the rights to nature, among other things, the government has later alienated parts of the environmental and indigenous movement and

repeatedly qualified it as “childish” and “marginal” (Jameson 2010, Bown 2011). At the same time, the new modernizing elite has proposed highly progressive policies to manage the oil sector, while the increased exploitation of another extractive sector, mining, has been proposed as a key component of its project of a post-oil based economy. This case study will focus particularly on the mining sector asking how environmental concerns are taken into considerations given its assigned role as a main income generator. Furthermore, we will ask what roles are played by the “new modernizing” elites, what are their attitudes related to the environment and how do they relate to the “old elites” consisting of transnational companies and actors related to them.

### **Argentina: shifting elites of the soy boom**

Over a period of 15 years Argentina has gone from being the “breadbasket of the world” with a development model based on the production and export of diverse agricultural products (meat, wheat, sunflower, corn etc.) and industrial products towards being a “soy republic”. From producing 3.7 million tons of soya in 1980, it now produces approximately 50 million tons annually (Teubal 2009). The steep increase started in 1996 when genetically modified soya was allowed and the planting of Roundup Ready started. Today soy production takes up 50 per cent of arable land, some of which was formerly used for traditional, small-scale crops and cattle farming, but also pushing “the “agricultural frontier” further and further into areas not formerly seen as arable. The price of land, whether forests or degraded agricultural land, did not exceed \$ 400 per hectare, revenue in the first three years of soybean production could be 30 times that amount. This has not only attracted foreign capital, but also led the traditional landed elite to shift to genetically modified soya, making them more dependent on international technology and prices and thus on alliances with external actors. Currently seven companies concentrate 60 per cent of the grain exports: Cargill, Bunge, Nidera, Vincentín, Dreyfus, Pecom-Agra y AGD. At the same time there has been an exodus of small farmers, contributing to what has been called “agriculture without farmers.”

The 2001 economic crisis led to a devaluation of the currency, which jointly with the increased international soy prices led to increasing income from the sector. It also led to the rise to power of Nestor Kirschner of the left-wing of the peronist party, and to “kirschnerismo” that was used to describe the governing style and ideology under his and his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirschner’s governments. This focused on rapid economic growth and redistribution, and has done little to limit the operation of large landowners and transnational companies, in spite of its anti neo-liberal and anti-imperial rhetoric. Moreover,

the increasingly documented environmental impact of the intensive, genetically modified mono-cropping with its high use of pesticides was ignored. These consequences included land-degradation as well as human health problems.

The institution that the government has established to deal with such issues is the Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y calidad Agroalimentaria (SENASA), an agency under the Ministry of Agriculture Livestock, Fisheries and Food (SAGPyA). Apart from being responsible for seed stocking, the main objective of SENASA is the inspection and certification of products and by-products of animal origin, plants, and agro-chemical residues, as well as the prevention, eradication and control of diseases that may affect the country's agricultural production. SENASA also seeks to develop standards and monitor compliance, to ensure the application of the Argentine Food Code and international standards, and regulates the production of safe food for human and animal consumption. The SENASA has endorsed GM-soy and avoided any official requirement to mark products derived from GM produce.

This study will investigate the extent to which the soy boom has prompted a shift in the composition and attitudes of the land-owning elites, how the political elites associated with kirchnerismo relate to them, as well as to the (new) scientific-technological, or knowledge-based elite, associated with SENASA. It will also study how the political elite close to the Kirschners deal with the opposition against GM-soy from environmental movements.

### **Brazil: Decentralization and the role of state governors in forest and climate policies**

Brazil's development strategy has been dependent on export-agriculture, agri-business, logging and other activities that put pressure on the forest. Yet, it counts on a set of laws and regulations to protect and manage forest. The most important pieces of legislation related to forests are the Forest Code, the laws that establish the National System of Protected Areas (SNUC) and the Public Forest Management Law. These are not only the corners of Brazilian efforts to protect ecological services, but also important because they refer directly to decentralization of forest policies. In the latter case, for example, opens opportunities for increased participation of subnational governments in forest management, even though the law implies a central regulatory control over forests, it opened.

Despite having all those powers and the abundance of forest resources in their states, most governors in Amazonia never cared much about the forest sector. Forests have been neglected as a potential source of income and revenues or worse, considered an obstacle to the expansion of the agricultural frontier. This situation has been changing slowly, particularly after 1998, when a wave of decentralization of forest policies was initiated in



Amazonia.

The main objective of this research is to study decentralization and the role of Amazonian governors in forest and climate policies in Brazil. We will look at two different levels: 1) climate and forest policies adopted at the state level under the initiative of the state governments; 2) the influence of governors and state secretaries on national climate and forest policies.

At the federal level, the analysis will focus on the discussions around the national Climate Change Policy, passed in 2009, and the Brazilian participation in the past four conferences of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In order to understand the role of state governments in those two processes, we will interview politicians and state officials at both national and state levels.

At state level, two separate studies will be done. The first one will be a cross-sectional comparative study of shifting state-level political elites in four states in Amazonia: Acre, Amazonas, Mato Grosso, and Pará. In 1998, the population of Acre elected a young forester, affiliated with the Workers Party (PT) as governor. He stayed in power for 8 years and elected his successor twice. This group have been trying to transform the economic structure of the state by fomenting the forest sector. Even though this political group encountered some obstacles, there have been major political changes in the state, notably, the increasing participation of social movements in policy-making. This is a clear instance of elite shift, with impacts on environmental policies, as well as on agriculture and ranching.

In 2002, the state of Amazonas also elected a young politician as its governor. Even though he was not affiliated with a so-called progressive or leftist party, he also tried to change the economic structure of the state, particularly in rural areas. In some aspects, the state seems to have moved faster than in Acre. During his 8 year in power, the governor created about 30% of all new protected areas in Brazil. He also started a payments-for-environmental-services program, which apparently is working well, and consolidated his political power in the rural areas of the state. In the state of Pará, the first female governor – also affiliated with the PT - was elected in 2006. She incorporated leaders of the rural social movement in her cabinet, increased participation, invested significant efforts in creating protected areas (almost as much as in Amazonas), but she failed to win a second term in office. In Mato Grosso on the other hand, the governor was also the world's largest soybean farmer, and the forest policies implemented were essentially adapted to the interest of export-agriculture. Thus, the state has consolidated its position as a leader in soybeans, cotton, and



maize, and is getting more investments to build a strong food processing industry. The governor also sat in office for 8 years (2003-2010).

In this study we will assess how far states have advanced in decentralizing forest policies. We will focus on policies aimed at increasing state capacity in four areas: 1) environmental licensing and land use monitoring; 2) protected areas; 3) forest management; 4) incentives for sustainable forest use.

The second study will complement the cross-comparison. It will be an in-depth case study of Acre, the state with the longest and most consistent experience in forest policies. Besides analyzing the policies aforementioned, we will take a close look at how the new elite came to power. We will pay special attention to their strategic alliances and to their relations with civil society organizations and with the federal and municipal governments. Beyond forest policies, we will look at other development policies and analyze if and how they connect and follow the government's general political program.

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