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Partnerships for Sustainable Forest Management: Lessons from the Ecuadorian Chocó

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This paper analyses comparatively the development of two coalitions for the sustainable forest management of remaining portions of the Ecuadorian Chocó owned by indigenous communities. One coalition, a network of environmental NGOs, promotes the co-operative commercialisation of community timber and puts pressure on timber merchants to raise the price they pay to producers. The other comprises a large forestry and wood-processing group which has joint ventures with a number of indigenous communities, and which is now seeking green certification for its logging operations. Both coalitions operate locally by promoting and implementing community forestry projects, and nationally by participating in the elaboration of Ecuador's new forest law. Various activities promoted by the two coalitions are compared: land titling; local-level conservation; the building of new community institutions; local-level social development; attempts to reform wood markets; and policy reform at the national level. The paper attempts to explain why both coalitions have tended to stereotype traditional Chocoan forest dwellers according to fixed ethnic categories, while overlooking their basic economic needs, values and development aspirations. Local communities have benefited from these partnerships in terms of land titling and training, but have not seen improvements in what they value most, the adequate provision of health and education services. The paper ends with a discussion of the factors contributing to the successful building of pro-poor coalitions.

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This paper compares and contrasts two partnerships that formed and developed over the last fifteen years in one of the most endangered 'hotspots of biodiversity', the Ecuadorian Chocó. Both have actively promoted the sustainable forest management of remaining portions of the Chocó forest owned by indigenous communities. One partnership, a network of environmental NGOs, promotes the co-operative commercialisation of community timber and puts pressure on timber merchants to raise the price they pay to producers. The other comprises a large forestry and wood-processing group which has joint ventures with a number of indigenous communities, and which is now seeking green certification for its logging operations. Both partnerships operate locally by promoting and implementing community forestry projects, and nationally by participating in the elaboration of Ecuador's new forest law. I analyse their sustained effort to reform unsustainable logging practices by comparing their intervention in four domains: land titling, agroforestry (including local-level conservation and the building of new community institutions), social development, and national policy reform. This analysis is based on ethnographic research in various Chachi villages in the River Cayapas basin. Several focus-group discussions were also carried out with villagers and NGO staff. Ethnographic fieldwork was complemented with extensive review of project documents. In the last section, I present the views of Chachi forest dwellers, who feel that their basic economic needs, values and development aspirations have not been fully understood or attended by either of the partnerships. Whereas indigenous communities have benefited to some extent from land legalisation and training programmes, they are bitterly disappointed that the price they obtain for their logs, far from improving, has continued to fluctuate and even fall. I end with some of the lessons learnt from this case study, in the hope that they will contribute to the successful building of pro-poor coalitions.

The Ecuadorian Chocó and its traditional inhabitants

The Ecuadorian portion of the Chocó rain forest lies in the province of Esmeraldas, which produces over sixty per cent of the country's timber and plywood. Esmeraldas, one of the poorest and most marginal regions of Ecuador, has had a long history of being cut off from the country's main poles of development, Guayaquil on the Pacific coast and Quito in the Highlands. Like for the rest of Ecuador, its economic development was triggered by the oil boom.[2] The transandean pipeline terminates near Esmeraldas city, where the country's main refinery and modern port facilities were built in the early 1970s. The oil boom triggered a construction boom,[3] which gave rise to industrial logging. Until the early 1960s, logging in the dense forests of the Ecuadorian Chocó was restricted to areas around natural harbours and the banks of larger rivers, where loggers exclusively extracted precious hardwood species such as *guayacán* (*Minquartia guianensis* or *Tabebuya guayacán*) and *chanul* (*Humiriastrum procerum*). Large veneer and plywood producing firms were created in the late 1970s (Salazar et al 1998), approximately a decade after the opening up of the agricultural frontier in Northwest Esmeraldas (Redclift 1978, Little 2001). Logging companies opportunistically followed colonists that grabbed public forest land along new roads, and deforested their newly acquired properties (Southgate and Whitaker 1994: 24-26, Little 2001: 107-109). Industrial logging also triggered a unique deforestation dynamic in the region under study, where it encouraged

wide-spread logging with chainsaws to supply its over-equipped sawmills[4], built a complete road infrastructure, and self-financed the maintenance of state roads (Sierra 2001:332).

With one fourth of its biodiversity lost in the last twenty-five years, the province has, according to some sources, become one of South America's most rapidly deforested areas. The forest cover has been reduced to 6 per cent of its original range due to commercial logging and agricultural activities, in particular, African palm plantations and cattle ranching (Sierra and Stallings 1998). Most of the remaining forest cover lies around and within the 204,420-hectare Cotacachi-Cayapas Reserve (RECC thereafter). The RECC was the first protected area to be created on mainland Ecuador, in 1968. Because it was designed to represent a maximum number of life zones (11), from the Cotacachi volcano (at 4,939 m. above sea level) all the way down to the lowest tropical rain forests of the River Cayapas watershed (at 30 m. above sea level), the RECC protects only a small portion of the Chocó, the bulk of which actually lies outside the reserve, in what has become the RECC's buffer zone, a region relatively densely populated with AfroEcuadorian and indigenous communities (see Map).

Distributed along the main rivers, the rural population of Esmeraldas, has developed a mixed economy relying on a combination of extractive activities, shifting cultivation, cattle ranching and trade, in which forest products have come to occupy a central role. For the past twenty years, selling timber has constituted the principal - if not the exclusive - source of cash income for a majority of households. Forest resources were not traditionally perceived as limited, and access to forested land was subject to little regulation or control. Land was not owned as such, but under the control of those who cultivated, or used it. This situation is completely transformed today, with the creation of permanent settlements with legal status and the titling of communal lands. If most communities close to markets have exhausted their forest reserves, the least accessible ones are still in possession of valuable natural resources assets.

Although both populations are very poor and marginalised, and although their adaptation to the environment and to the regional market economy is broadly similar, there are some notable differences between Chachi Indians (or Cayapas) and Afroecuadorians. For historical reasons I have no space to get into here, the AfroAmerican population is varied and highly mobile. Afroecuadorians travel extensively within the Colombian and Ecuadorian Chocó, as well as between urban centres and remote rural communities. Each adult depends on a vast network of relatives, fictive kin, trade partners and friends. These networks extend from the upper course of the numerous rivers that criss-cross the tropical forest to their lower course and to the coast, where the main towns are located, both in Ecuador and in Colombia. In addition to connecting rural folks with urban dwellers, these networks connect better-offs with lesser-offs, and play an essential role in the mobilisation of resources. It is through them that Black people get access to labour, goods, and services. Since their historical participation as slave labour in gold mining, Chocoan AfroAmericans have formed an ethnic identity based on extractivism and trade. And in Northwest Esmeraldas, logs are today the principal forest product they extract and trade. Having steadily moved up-river

in the aftermath of the banana boom (in the 1960s) to settle in what the Chachi consider their homeland, Afroecuadorians greatly outnumber the latter. Fluent speakers of the national language (Spanish) and much more integrated in the regional economy than native Indians are, they feel racially, socially and culturally superior to the Chachi.

The Chachi feel dominated and exploited by the AfroEcuadorian population, which despise them as backward, poor and ignorant. This is particularly true in the context of the timber trade, where patron-client relationships tie Chachi forest owners and log producers to AfroEcuadorian traders and intermediaries. The Chachi have tried to protect their ethnic identity with strict rules against mixed marriages and a series of institutions aimed at preserving ethnic endogamy. Research findings also suggest that Chachi and AfroEcuadorian families differ in terms of their development aspirations. Whereas AfroEcuadorian families tend to see their remote river dwellings as safety homes to return to when things go wrong in the cities where they work, Chachi people continue to be attached to their traditional subsistence economy. They are extremely proud of their system of bilingual, inter-cultural education. And their main concern today is to secure sufficient financial resources to maintain an adequate level of health and education provision, as well as to finance the schooling and professional training of their own teachers, doctors and foresters.

Environmental degradation in the region is directly related to the fact that cash is, on the whole, generated through selling wood from the forest.[5] It is also related to the fact that the wood commodity chain is strikingly asymmetrical. Those located at the beginning of the chain (typically Chachi Indians) massively exploit natural resources and their own labour force. Sierra (2001: 334) has found that excessive waste during felling and sawing amounts to up to 60 per cent of the original timber volume, an estimate corroborated by my own research. The introduction of chainsaws in the later 1960s considerably changed labour arrangements. Chainsaws are rented, lent, given in exchange for timber, and this with a mix of cash and goods and services between wood producers and intermediary traders. Typically, groups of Chachi extract wood from forested land they own as a family or as a community, and sell it to an intermediary who has capital, a shop, a small sawmill, and/ or close connections with large timber companies. Women participate indirectly in this activity, by cooking for the men, and by ensuring the family's subsistence when the men are away cutting or transporting wood. Traders and intermediaries, who are located closer to the end of the commodity chain, realise substantial profits. However, maximum profits are realised in the processing plants owned by white urban industrialists.[6]

Implementing sustainable forest management through partnerships

Community forestry was introduced in Ecuador by various actors (bilateral aid agencies, timber companies, conservation NGOs and others) who sent government officials, foresters and indigenous leaders to Quintana Roo in the Yucatan Peninsula of south-east Mexico. Mayan foresters were also invited to visit Northwest Ecuador. Both the voluntary and the industrial sectors used the Quintana Roo model in the mid-1990s to develop social forestry programmes. The significant ecological, geographic, institutional,

economic, social and cultural differences existing between the two regions and their forests were largely ignored or overlooked. However, the heraldic reference to Quintana Roo allowed antagonistic networks to define a common - albeit implicit - objective. They would both work at implementing community forestry as the most efficient way to raise local living standards and protect the environment, while competing acrimoniously on the issue of who is the best partner for local communities, and the most legitimate agent of sustainability (Rival 2003). I present the two networks in more detail below, before discussing their characterisation as partnerships.

Sustainable use of biological resources (SUBIR)

SUBIR (1991-2002) was the largest USAID-financed integrated conservation and development programme (ICDP) in the world. Launched in 1991 after two years of negotiation and preparation, SUBIR was USAID-Ecuador's response to the country's unsustainable use of natural resources. In a 1989 USAID document, worries were expressed that natural resources were not developed as long-term economic resources:

> "Ecuador has more biological diversity per unit area than any other country in Latin America and, perhaps, the world. More importantly, much of this diversity is endemic to Ecuador. Ecuador has already sacrificed substantial future economic opportunities as a result of careless and short-sighted management of natural resources. The mismanagement of natural resources makes poor sense for the environment and for development. Efforts must be made to ensure that Ecuador's remaining valuable soil, water, forests and coastal resources are managed rather than destroyed, as they are developed in the coming years".

SUBIR, which was allocated 15 million dollars over a ten-year period, proposed to 'identify, test, and develop economically, ecologically and socially sustainable resource management models in selected conservation units and their buffer zones in order to preserve the biodiversity and improve the economic well-being of communities through their participation in the management of renewable natural resources.'

This ambitious pro-conservationist programme was implemented for the first four years (Phase I) by a consortium comprising The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere), under the directive of USAID, and in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture. Phase I combined five areas of activity (regional organisational strengthening; protected area management; ecotourism; land use and agroforestry; and research and monitoring) in five different regions of Ecuador, which was far too ambitious. The scale of intervention (five major protected areas and their buffer zones) and the number of partner organisations (three major international environmental NGOs, two important Ecuadorian environmental NGOs, twelve government agencies, and at least forty regional and local indigenous and peasant organisations) were far too big for efficient management and field implementation (see Figure 1/a). Besides, there were serious tensions between CARE, which gave priority to social development, and TNC

and WCS, which gave priority to conservation biology. There was no consensus within the consortium on objectives, priorities, roles or responsibilities, and expectations were unrealistic. Moreover, planned activities for protected areas overlapped, when they did not openly conflict, with parallel government activities funded under the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Fundación Natura, the main Ecuadorian NGO involved in SUBIR for Phase I left the consortium to work with the government on strengthening the national protected area system. It was then decided that SUBIR would focus exclusively on the buffer zones of two protected areas, the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve (RECC) in the Northwest and the Yasuní National Park in eastern Amazonia.

Phase II (1994-1997) saw a complete reorganisation of the coalition in charge of implementing the ICDP. The project was also reoriented, both geographically and in terms of priorities (see Figure 1/b). CARE, which became the coalition's leader, was in charge of the project's overall management, as well as of the social development components, such as land legalisation, environmental policies, fair trade, legal and social work training, and local participation. In replacement of Fundación Natura, CARE selected to newly-formed Ecuadorian conservation NGOs, Jatún Sacha and Ecociencia. The former was responsible for implementing natural resource management and biodiversity protection (and, more specifically, sustainable land use through agroforestry and community forestry), the latter for biodiversity research, GIS mapping, data management and ecotourism. Now working through Ecociencia and Jatún Sacha, TNC, WCS and their Ecuadorian partners developed one of the first large-scale biodiversity monitoring attempts in Ecuador. Forest cover was monitored through the comparative analysis of satellite imagery. Between 1999 and 2002, various parts of the ecosystem were measured bi-annually: birds, amphibians, scarab beetles, and aquatic vertebrates. Ecociencia developed a rigorous experimental design to measure and compare the impacts of different forest use intensities with the scientific assistance of WCS. ICDP activities around the RECC comprised five components: a)- institutional strengthening and organisational development; b)- policy and legal intervention; c)- improved land use; d)- biodiversity research; and e)- commercialisation and marketing of sustainably produced wood and non-wood products.

Phase II put special emphasis on the legalisation of traditional communal lands (particularly for the benefit of AfroEcuadorian communities), and on the training of community 'paralegals'. Phase III (1998-2002), which involved the same basic set of partners, shifted the emphasis from land titling to agroforestry and SFM. Two commercial networks were organised, one for agricultural products, and one for wood products. In the last two years of the project, efforts were geared to strengthen local participation and people's sense of ownership over the project, and SUBIR collaborated more closely with regional organisations, particularly UONNE (Unión de las Organizaciones Negras del Norte del Ecuador).

Harvest agreements between logging companies and Chachi communities

A leading Ecuadorian wood-processing group anxious to secure its long-term wood supply forms the core of the private partnership discussed here. A large part of the wood

it processes comes from Esmeraldas. The commercial group's long-term objective is to rely exclusively on timber from its own plantations and from privately-owned natural forests managed sustainably. To this effect, it developed an ambitious plan of plantation, afforestation and reforestation in the early 1990s, but failed to secure World Bank funding to implement it, due to the international political hostility vis-à-vis logging companies operating in tropical rain forest areas (Rival 2003).

I have explained elsewhere (Rival 2003) how this leading commercial group took advantage of government schemes intelligently, investing capital in technological improvements, and making the most of tax relief and other measures aimed at promoting afforestation. It also benefited from a government ban on log exports, which kept the price of unprocessed wood artificially low (Salazar *et al* 1998). More recently, the group's major productive constraint has been to secure regular and cheap supplies of wood in a region where the most accessible timber has already been cut, and where the agricultural frontier has been stabilised. Although the group would prefer, if given the choice, to acquire more private land or operate in forest concessions owned by the state, it finds the signing of long-term agreements with indigenous communities to be a satisfactory solution, mainly because these communities are made up of a relatively small number of families (20 to 30) owning sizeable extensions of primary forest (between 2,000 and 12,000 hectares).

This for-profit commercial organisation designed a sustainable forestry project based on the Quintana Roo participatory community forest management model, which led to the signing of twenty-year harvest agreements with several Chachi communities. Its main actions have been to: (1) obtain the legalisation of Chachi communal forest land; (2) strengthen local and regional Chachi organisations; (3) implement agroforestry programmes; (4) encourage community-based forest management; and (5) rationalise land use in each community through 'zoning' plans. The wood-processing group has also played a major role in the creation of COMAFORS (Corporación de Manejo Forestal Sustentable), which represents the industrial and commercial interests of the Ecuadorian forestry sector in national and international fora, and lobbies the national government on forestry issues. The group is now seeking green certification for its wood products from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

In order to understand the nature of the three harvest agreements signed between the wood-processing group and three Chachi communities in 1993, one must take into consideration the particular structure of the wood-processing group, which forms a holding. The holding comprises a complex and vertically integrated set of companies (logging, timber, veneer, plywood, furniture-making, retailing companies, and more). In addition to sharing commercial interests, these companies are also linked through close family ties. Although an integral part of the holding, the private foundation in charge of silviculture, plantation development and SFM must work hard to convince the other parts of the holding that its activities are essential to the group's overall economic growth and business prosperity. Whereas environmental NGOs, particularly militant NGOs such as *Acción Ecológica* (close to *Green Peace*) refuse to see the private foundation as a NGO because of its obvious links with the private sector which finances it, the wood-

processing group's direct competitors remain highly suspicious of its professed green and ethical business position. To gain trust nationally and acceptance internationally, the wood-processing group has thus involved a third, 'civil society,' party, a leading Ecuadorian environmental NGO in one case, and an international development agency in another one.

Networks, partnerships or coalitions?

Although they both try to find solutions to forest destruction and short-term profit seeking, and although they both involve the building of trading relations with primary producers in economically vulnerable communities, the two partnerships under discussion defer markedly. One gives priority to business, the other to human development and conservation values. For the commercial group, managing forests sustainably in partnership with local owners and producers is a business imperative; economic performance must be the driving force. For SUBIR, the development of ethical trading is part of a wider set of actions aimed at creating social and economic incentives to enrich human capital and protect the environmental integrity of a region rich in biodiversity over the long term. Accordingly, the structure of the two networks are markedly different; and they do not involve the same number of partners. While SUBIR comprises a great number of NGOs and local communities, the company-community partnerships essentially involve one of the companies belonging to the commercial group, its private foundation responsible for sustainable forestry, and a Chachi village. Various additional actors are involved, not as direct stakeholders but as facilitators, such as the Chachi Federation (FECCHE), foresters and consultants from aid agencies, who offer their technical and financial support, and a national environmental NGO.

Therefore, I propose to use the term 'coalition' for the network conforming SUBIR, and reserve the term 'partnership' to describe the development of timber harvesting operations between the private sector and forest dwellers.[7]

Comparative analysis of the two sustainable forest management projects

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) is a highly contested concept (see Lele et al 2000, Putz et al 1999, Lugo, 1999, and Bawa and Seidler 1998, among others). The wood-processing group uses ITTO criteria and indicators for SFM in natural tropical forests, which it applies exclusively to species producing roundwood. SUBIR, in contrast, has adapted internationally recognised protocols to develop simplified management plans for harvesting all marketable wood in community and family-owned native forests. However, the stated objectives (decelerate deforestation and reduce poverty by setting up community forestry schemes) of both networks have much in common.

Land tenure

Ecuador ratified ILO Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples in 1998, the year when it also adopted a new constitution, which formally recognises the multi-ethnic and inter-cultural character of the Ecuadorian state, and gives special land rights to

indigenous and AfroEcuadorian peoples[8]. These changes have led both partnerships to give great importance to communal land titling as part of their SFM initiatives. This is entirely consistent with current policy thinking, which calls for the massive devolution of ownership and access rights from national governments to local communities (White and Martin 2002).

It is during Phase II that SUBIR focused on communal land rights. Its support went primarily to communities in the RECC buffer zone, but it also intervened on behalf of AfroEcuadorian communities living close to the Colombian border, in a desperate attempt to stop oil palmiculturists from transforming 20,000.00 hectares of Chocó primary forest into African palm plantations. SUBIR has been instrumental in helping AfroEcuadorians transform their status from poor landless settlers encroaching on state forests to traditional communities with exactly the same legal rights as indigenous people. SUBIR's original aim was to obtain from the Ecuadorian government the legalisation of an ethnic reserve (territorial circumscription) around the RECC, but this plan proved very controversial, and was abandoned. SUBIR's land titling programme was highly participatory. Over 60 Chachi and AfroEcuadorian legal paratechnicians (*paralegales* in Spanish) were formally trained in law. Working along the partner NGO Ecociencia, the communities were actively involved in drawing local maps and establishing community boundaries.

The business partnership also obtained the legalisation of indigenous communal lands, but exclusively for the three Chachi communities that signed a harvest agreement with the wood-processing group. The group's private foundation views the uncontrolled colonisation of public forests as a major threat to SFM. It has used its political influence to get the army to expel land invaders from the natural forests and the plantations it owns, as well as from the Chachi forests it plans to log over the next twenty years. Finally, the foundation has also been involved in a complex and lengthy process of land purchase, allowing for SFM activities on its own land.

Forestry and agroforestry

Both partnerships have been very active in designing and implementing forestry and agroforestry programmes as part of their general SFM strategy. Both ensure that the forest is inventoried and the community land divided in communal and family-owned areas, as well as in areas for agriculture, timber harvesting, and reforestation. Protective forest reserves are also created.

SUBIR started to experiment with sustainable logging during Phase II, when other NGOs active in the RECC buffer zone intensified their fight against the low stumpage prices paid to producers (see below). Forestry came to the fore during Phase III, but not as an independent activity. For SUBIR, community forestry (sustainable timber extraction) and agroforestry (improved agriculture and animal husbandry for family consumption and commercialisation) were two sides of the same coin - improved land management. Improved land management, the responsibility of the NGO Jatún Sacha (with technical assistance from WCS) was conceived as a conservation priority. As a

result, SUBIR community forest and family farm management plans were far more pro-conservation than government legislation required them to be. SUBIR was pursuing in parallel a programme promoting the commercial development of wood, non-wood and farm products, a problematic undertaking in an area with few comparative marketing advantages and high transport costs. The coalition found it very difficult to integrate forestry, agroforestry and marketing activities coherently, and soon realised that local villagers did not have the capacity to participate in the three areas simultaneously.

The private foundation in charge of SFM on behalf of the business partnership has developed detailed forest management plans for each of the Chachi communities which signed a harvest agreement. These plans, extremely detailed, technical, and costly, have not been written with, or for, the villagers. As such, they clearly illustrate the more technocratic approach to competence and management found in the private sector. Forestry, reforestation and afforestation activities have varied a great deal from case to case, and from year to year. On the whole, the private partnership tends to be pragmatic, responding to specific local demands or government regulations, rather than taking initiatives. As forestry operations are highly specialised and mechanised, minimal transfer has taken place. For a few years, substantial resources were allocated to develop forestry and agroforestry experiments in one particular community, and the programmes developed were as impressive and as successful as those implemented by SUBIR.

SFM and human development

Social development is an intrinsic part of SFM as understood by the coalition and the partnership. Both have included local participation, capacity-building, and skill transfer in their programmes, and both have worked at fostering new community organisations to support SFM and conservation actions. Social development has often meant offering economic incentives and subsidies for both.

SUBIR rationalised the use of incentives and subsidies on the ground that poverty causes environmental degradation. Subsidies in the company-community partnership were justified more pragmatically. A logging company prefers to pay for logs with services. This is the most efficient way of motivating the locals to trade their timber and of securing exclusive access to particular tracts of forest. Whereas villagers have criticised SUBIR for introducing unwanted economic activities (such as the husbandry of goats or chickens) supported with the wrong economic incentives (such as the gift of unnecessary community buildings), they have criticised their logging partners for (1)-keeping timber prices extremely low; (2)- not generating higher community benefits than those obtained without SFM; and (3)- not offering valued investments (medical attention, scholarships, access roads, and so forth) on a continued basis.

For the timber company, social investments result more costly than direct payments. However, they allow for the generation of public goods of greater value than the direct distribution of - relatively meagre - profits for timber sales. They also have the great advantage of lessening the risk of criticism by those concerned with the corrupting influence of money, or with the market integration of indigenous people. Villagers are

well aware that companies are paying for the wood with services that the government should provide, and that this is the main reason why prices are low. However, they feel they have no other alternative to obtain highly needed roads, medical attention and support for education.

SUBIR provided excellent training in very specialised fields (law, social planning, accountancy, forestry, botany, biology, marketing, and others), both for its Ecuadorian NGO partners, and for the buffer zone communities, where more than 200 paratechnicians were trained. SUBIR initiated the documentation of Chachi indigenous ecological knowledge during Phase I and II. A significant number of NGO workers and community members participated in workshops and conferences held in Ecuador, the USA or Central America, and visited other Latin American ICDP project sites. The main criticism heard in the communities is that whereas the training programme benefited students and young professionals (foresters, ecologists and agronomists employed by the NGOs), it did not benefit the local population to the same extent. There was resentment that the best qualified jobs went to 'nationals' and not to 'Esmeraldeños', while unskilled positions invariably went to villagers. People were also disappointed that the training certificates issued by SUBIR were not recognised by employers. However, the depth and scope of the knowledge acquired by indigenous parabiologists, as well as their evident passion for their newly acquired science, represent real achievements.

The level of literacy and numeracy is low in Esmeraldas, where a significant proportion of rural dwellers have only a few years of primary schooling. The task of strengthening local organisations, starting local producer networks, and building community forestry committees is therefore daunting, and so is that of communicating highly technical and legalistic bodies of knowledge. This is especially the case with the Chachi population, which uses the vernacular Chapalaa'chi in all its public meetings. SUBIR's community forestry activities did not last long enough to develop an appropriate level of technical assistance to help communities capture some of the potential value added in exploiting timber for higher value markets. CARE produced a number of illustrated booklets written in Spanish and Chapalaa'chi on various aspects of forestry. Ecociencia published a number of oral traditions and folkloric tales. During Phase III, CARE focused its efforts on AfroEcuadorian Second Level Organisations (SLOs). However, given that these organisations depended almost entirely on SUBIR's financial and technical aid, they found it extremely difficult to continue to function when the project ended.

The timber company's pragmatic response to the community's demand for mainstream education has in many ways satisfied the Chachi population more than SUBIR's less targeted and more long-term approach to human development and capacity building. The company routinely pays the wages of primary school teachers and offers scholarships in the communities that control forest tracts it wishes to exploit. As part of the more formal, legally-binding harvest agreements with Chachi villages, this practice has been expanded to include paying for the upgrading of school buildings, for the training of teachers and other professional development activities, and for college studentships (which have benefited primarily the children of teachers and leaders). The

company even helped one community to obtain from the government the creation of a new technical college specialising in agroforestry. Teaming with various NGOs, the company has also organised capacity-building workshops in its partner Chachi villages to strengthen their level of socio-political organisation and develop their awareness of the links between development and the environment. Finally, if SUBIR 'specialised' in AfroEcuadorian culture and supported numerous artistic events, the wood-processing group took the survival of Chachi culture as its *cause célèbre* and employed a young Ecuadorian anthropologist to document Chachi lore, ethnobotany and shamanism.

National level SFM policies

Like many countries rich in biodiversity, Ecuador went through an intense period of legal and institutional reform in the 1990s. Both partnerships actively participated in the debate on the governance of biodiversity, and both contributed to the design of new national policies involving land tenure and forestry. And what started as a fierce, regional market dispute ended up as a national policy-reform dialogue.

It is not before the late 1990s, when Fundación Natura began to promote the introduction of FSC standards in Ecuador that environmental NGOs gradually relaxed their hostility towards the private sector, seen as the main culprit for the destruction of the Ecuadorian Chocó. For almost ten years (1988-1997), environmental NGOs active in Esmeraldas combined efforts to help Chachi and AfroEcuadorian log producers strengthen their bargaining power, and to force the logging companies to raise their prices. There were several attempts to form a local producer co-operative, break the monopoly of the few large companies operating in the region, and find niche markets abroad. A range of obstacles prevented the success of these initiatives. SUBIR's strong disagreement with other NGOs on the commercialisation of timber from private family plots was a major obstacle. SUBIR objected to the ethical trading of logs produced with no management plan, and proceeding from forest lands earmarked for agriculture. Whereas SUBIR could not support the community forestry network proposed by other campaigning NGOs, the latter could not help local producers receive a higher share of the final product value. If by the end of the 1990s SUBIR failed to reform the wood market, it had gained considerable knowledge of the timber trade in Ecuador, and had come to realise that the powerful plywood and veneer companies were there to stay. It had also realised that alternative economic activities, such as NTFP commercialisation and ecotourism, had very limited prospects. Wood remained the most valuable product of the Chocó forest, and prices would remain below international levels for a long time to come. SUBIR thus concentrated all its efforts on influencing national forestry policies.

SUBIR used its local forestry activities to foster policy change at the national level. Without being properly speaking multi-scalar, SUBIR intervened on multiple fronts at various scales, with the view of defending the biodiversity of one specific region, the Ecuadorian Chocó. Land titling, forestry policies, forest management plans, or economic incentives were not 'spatialised' interventions. Rather, they formed a combined set of actions, all directed towards one objective: influence the design and the implementation of the policy framework that was to govern the sustainable management of Ecuador's

native forests. SFM was therefore a political campaign for SUBIR, which adopted a wide range of strategies to bring policy issues to the forefront of the national debate.

Ecuadorian foresters who led Jatún Sacha's community forestry programmes were instrumental in re-writing the Forest Law. In (often uneasy) collaboration with the private sector, they also wrote a number of law enforcement decrees that permit the application of the SFM principles found in the new law, before its actual ratification by Congress.[9] These norms, which in many ways represent a compromise between the industrial and the conservation NGO sector, were agreed after many heated discussions, and adopted by the Ministry of the Environment. Known as 'Norm 32', they govern the preparation of forest management plans and timber licenses. SUBIR foresters also proposed the *regencias forestales* (forest engineers who are granted the authority to supervise the implementation of forest management plans) and *vigilencia verde* (the monitoring of timber shipments at key road sites by NGO members), which are now fully incorporated into the proposed forest law and associated operative norms. These two concepts derive from Chilean and Costa Rican pilot projects carried out jointly by the government, the private sector, and environmental NGOs.

If SUBIR can be said to have been proactive on multiple policy fronts, the community-company partnership has had a more reactive role in the national forest policy debate. It has basically opposed or amended the proposals coming from SUBIR. Both networks include highly qualified and competent foresters with a wealth of experience in community forestry, and both have collaborated closely with the Ministry for the Environment. If the private sector's input in the policy debate regarding the new forest law has been more reactive than proactive, this is changing with the new debate on environmental services and carbon trade, in which COMAFORS is taking the lead (Barantes et al 2001). It will be interesting to see what types of alliances will arise in the future to implement the provision of environmental services, and what the involvement of local partners will be. Local governments were almost entirely absent from the two partnerships analysed here, despite the fact that indigenous and AfroEcuadorian leaders highly value this form of political representation.

From the perspective of poor forest dwellers

The pro-conservation coalition and the business partnership both arouse in response to global campaigns to save the world's remaining tropical rain forests. With a biodiversity conservation agenda, SUBIR moved from leading the planning of a national protected area management system to implementing an integrated conservation and development programme in one buffer zone. The wood-processing group, responding to growing wood scarcity, international pressure, the impossibility of securing financial aid for plantation development, and new market opportunities has implemented company-community business partnerships with several indigenous communities, from which it initially acquired timber through intermediaries.

Both initiatives have succeeded in securing communal property rights for traditional forest dwellers. This success corresponds to the overlap between global consensus (the

devolution of state-owned land is a good thing in and of itself, and even more so when the new proprietors are indigenous or traditional communities) and local aspirations (communal land is perceived as an important local asset). However, one should not overlook a whole range of complex rights issues that are emerging, which involve gender and generational inequalities, as well as new tensions between individual, family and collective rights. This is particularly true of AfroEcuadorian communities, where wealthier families and successful urban migrants prefer the market freedom afforded by individualised land titles to the constraints and limits of inalienable collective rights (Rival forthcoming). As a result, it is most likely that the land issue, far from being resolved, will become explosive in the near future.

Both initiatives have helped promote sustainable community forestry in a region experiencing rapid and wasteful deforestation, but it has proven very difficult to institutionalise change without reforming regional wood markets and price structures, which requires a more encompassing regional effort. This was attempted in 1996, when the Provincial Government of Esmeraldas, the national forest and parks government agency (INEFAN) and the German overseas technical assistance mission (GTZ) signed a co-operation agreement to promote a multi-stakeholder debate, define a regional strategy for the sustainable development of Esmeraldas, and agree an emergency action plan. In addition to representatives from the pro-conservation coalition and the business partnership, many actors were invited to participate in this initiative, such as members from other NGOs active in the province, government institutions, local universities, international aid agencies, indigenous organisations, and professional organisations representing the timber industry. A dialogue on prices was initiated between these various actors and a fledgling community forestry movement comprised of villages that had elected forest committees and formed a commercial association.[10] Many discussions took place on development priorities for Esmeraldas, the creation and strengthening of a system of public administration and control, and the generalisation of community forest development schemes as a means to improve social welfare. But actors soon disagreed on priorities. While some advocated the design of a rational road system financed in partnership by the Ministry of Public Works, the Prefecture of Esmeraldas, the private sector, and local communities through their harvest funds, others defended low impact technology and the self-management of natural resources by small communities. The latter were opposed to large companies managing natural resources on the communities' behalf (Rival 1997). Political views were too divergent to result in any meaningful consensus, and local communities were too under-represented for the process to be really democratic. However, this initiative was a positive first attempt to enlarge the debate on the sustainable economic development of Esmeraldas. It showed that solutions to conflicts between conservation and development priorities, and between business and social priorities require the building of a more encompassing region-focused coalition, and a more decisive effort to involve local and regional government agencies, particularly those involved in socio-economic welfare. It showed that local governments should play a key role in pro-poor coalitions.

In contrast with the initiative described above, the pro-conservation coalition and the business partnership compared in this paper have not considered Esmeraldas' regional

government as a partner for social reform. Both have processed land rights for communities with the national land titling agency, and both have lobbied various ministries for legal reforms in the forestry sector, but neither has addressed the regional development of Esmeraldas in its entirety. Their priorities for action have been framed by the assumption that Chachi and AfroEcuadorian villagers are equally poor and marginalised, a condition assumed to cause environmental degradation, hence requiring intervention. SUBIR, in particular, has tended to offer ready-made solutions based on assumptions, preconceptions, and pre-determined social categorisations, instead of carrying out preliminary research on actual household budgeting and other basic local economic conditions, or on local needs, views, values and aspirations. Local people were often treated as project recipients or targets, and not as true partners in research, development, and conservation.

The challenges faced by producer associations in remote and marginal areas such as the River Cayapas are daunting. The poor forest dwellers of Esmeraldas know that their communal forests are relatively small, and that the volumes of wood remaining for sale are dwindling rapidly. They produce mainly for their own subsistence,[11] and use timber sale revenues to cover large, unexpected costs. Many families depend heavily on government benefits paid directly to mothers, and on the material aid received through state schools. Many Chachi people think that if education and health were entirely free, and if transport was cheaper, their worst economic difficulties would be solved. They would like basic services (health, education, road infrastructure and public transport) to be provided by government agencies, rather than by NGOs or the private sector, which has so far benefited from protected market conditions (through subsidies, tax breaks, soft loans, and so forth), and which will continue to receive, thanks to green certification and guaranteed international niche markets, a much greater share of the benefits than indigenous communities will ever receive (see also Hall 2000, and Angelsen and Wunder 2003), unless the initiative for the sustainable development of Esmeraldas gathers fresh momentum.

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[2] Until the oil boom in the mid-1970s, Ecuador was one of the poorest countries in Latin America, largely dependent on agricultural exports, with very little industry.

[3] According to Sierra (2001: 331), the Ecuadorian construction sector consumes 60 per cent of the sawnwood produced from natural forests in Ecuador, one-third of which come from Northwest Ecuador.

[4] According to Sierra (2001: 337), they currently work at 60 to 77 per cent of their capacity. He also mentions that veneer exports increased by 268 per cent between 1982 and 1993.

[5] Chocoan rural dwellers participate in both hardwood and softwood markets, each with its own challenges and advantages. I have more information on the sawnwood and roundwood market, which links communities to a few large industrial plywood and veneer makers.

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[6] Several people interviewed estimate that logging companies make a profit of over 200 per cent by purchasing standing trees from poor farmers and indigenous peoples.

[7] Lewis (2000), Landell-Mills and Ford (1999), and Mayers and Vermeulen (2002) all offer similar definitions of business partnerships between private companies and communities, to be differentiated from alliances between co-operating civil society associations.

[8] The controversial notion of 'indigenous territorial circumscription', which links territorial affiliation to ethnic identity has yet to be approved by the National Congress.

[9] Given the industrial sector's hostility to the proposed forest law, the law is still under review by the Ministry of the Environment, and has yet to be passed by Congress.

[10] This short-lived network called *'red de manejo forestal comunitario and frente de comercialización de productos forestales*' made various attempts to improve logging techniques and commercialise community wood at better prices in the late 1990s.

[11] A large number of families are still producing for their own consumption, and subsist with less than $ 12 per month.