Shifting the Lens of Common Property in Lowland South America

Community-Based Forestry and Indigenous Politics in the 1990s

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Introduction

Initial thinking for this paper developed as part of an set of interdisciplinary (social, economic and biological) workshops focused on current problems community-based forestry projects in the Amazon and Yucatan regions of Latin America. The meetings were hosted by the University of Wisconsin's Latin American Studies Program, the Land Tenure Center, the Program on Conservation Biology and Cultural Survival.

My main question, expanded on the management problems and arose from field observations over the past 5-7 years, was:

> *Paralleling a series of community-based forest management projects which suggest local peoples' inability to manage or sustain common resources, why do we now hear strong indigenous proclamations regarding rights to large tracts of land and natural resources throughout the Amazon Basin and part of lowland Central America as well?*

I will argue that problems associated with community-based forestry illustrate political strategies more than technical or administrative failures to manage common property. On the contrary, indigenous peoples are first seeking to redefine the territorial unit of discourse with regard to common property. These projects reflect the changing indigenous politics toward land rights. They also shed light on innovative, non-violent strategies to alter historical patterns of inter-ethnic relations and conflicts. Part of that process involves their efforts to redefine land and resource rights. In brief, the situation illustrates a broad indigenous movement toward political and economic parity as an antecedent to the "institutionalization" of common property management.

Institutionalizing Common Property Management

I think we could suggest that indigenous peoples, particularly those organized into corporate bodies (organizations and ethnic federations) are seeking an "institutional approach" to common property management (Ostrom 1992, Bates 1988, Pinkerton 1987). The approach contrasts notably with other efforts -- governmental or industrial -- to govern and manage many of the lands normally sought for forest production. Indigenous peoples know that there is often misunderstanding (genuine or intentional) as to who holds rights over much of the land now used for forestry. Many communities clearly define sections of their territory as "common property" -- i.e. lands held jointly by some corporate unit but used individually. By contrast, the state, private individuals, and corporations often seek to define such lands as unoccupied, idle, or waste lands *(Sp. tierras baldias)*. These lands thus become property of the state, over which it can exercise rights -- conservation, production, rent, or sale. By extension, any policy initiative regarding use emanates from some form of state-level governing body which expects or hopes that those who actually draw from or otherwise manage the resources will either adhere voluntarily to the policies or will respond to coercion or restraints. Such plans and expectations, however, are frequently frustrated by non-compliance or other forms of evasion at a local level.

To explain this failure, Ostrom notes that in many of these failed cases the access and use rules are established by those unfamiliar with local rules, informal boundaries, related problems, or other sources of potential conflict. Similarly, physical and social distance, or an inability to accurately access perceived violations, severely limits high-level governing bodies' ability to identify instances of non-compliance and/or to enforce compliance. In brief, in terms of "operationalizing" rules, such bodies rarely have either the local knowledge to design appropriate and acceptable rules or the local presence to identify and control violations.

By contrast, the proposed "institutional" approach reverses this governing process and begins with the stakeholders and their local knowledge. Here the various stakeholders create a set of mutually-negotiated "working relations." These, in turn, are loosely converted into "operational rules." These relations are progressively strengthened, defined and formalized into policies which are administered through formal governance rules and bodies (Ostrom 1992:29-57). Likewise, when there are violations of the mutually-agreed upon rules, recourse can be sought through the policies and applied by the governance system. In the case of a wood lot, for example, the property owner(s) work out an agreement with potential users (loggers) which is then submitted for approval to some superordinate body (the governance aspect) which defines the agreement as "policy" and subsequently oversees and controls violations by simply holding violators to their own agreements.

The logic is that those who reach the agreement best understand its nuances and complexities and are in a better position to monitor for violations, something which most government agencies or similar superordinate bodies simply cannot do. In Latin America many indigenous organizations hope to "operationalize" rules for self-organization and self-governance of land and resources. To begin that process, recognition of broad rights to "territories" is an essential first step.

Indigenous "Territories"

In much of the region indigenous communities are working to establish rights to broad and quite extensive indigenous "territories," rather than exclusive individual plots or single-community land titles. This land category is unique; as a "territory," rights -- e.g. access, use, resource ownership, royalties and similar uses—are open to negotiation and do not necessarily exclude any form of agreement or limit activities. On the contrary, the legal mechanisms which follow formal "territorial" recognition might include:

-- private/community land titling;
-- granting of easements for commercial activity;
-- the creation of a reserve or protected zone; and/or
-- the establishment of a cooperative management regime.

These forms of tenure, use and subsequent management illustrates a range of means to negotiate use and rights and to seek long-term resource management..

Inevitable Conflicts

Recognition of territories is an essential first step toward broad institutionalization of common property use. Though this is the sort of process and resultant structure which many Latin American indigenous organizations seek, the initial negotiation to create acceptable "working relations" between the indigenous/ethnic groups and State are barely underway. Indigenous peoples understand that the ability to establish "working relations" assumes a degree of balance which often does not exist. The territorial debates are a means toward more balanced working relationships and to thus move the process along. They are thus antecedent to the complex sets of nested rules which characterize institutionalization.

Territories in the Amazon

The efforts to claim and secure broad, large "indigenous territories" are part of a pattern which first appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s, initiated by the region's newly established indigenous organizations and is currently being played out in Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador. (Similar patterns are also developing the densely forested areas just west of the Savannah lands along Nicaragua's Miskito Coast).

Likewise a second pattern also seemed widespread -- indigenous-run forest management projects operating within small but nonetheless highly-visible sectors of these territorial claims. The project appear to suggest serious problems with the local management of **common-property resources.** Previously and for other uses, much of their land had been successfully managed in common for hunting, fishing, gathering and itinerant residence. Yet it looked like they were blowing it for community-based forestry projects.

Ostrom has suggested that perhaps, for cultural or historical reasons, some groups may be able mange common property while others may not. Such generalizations generally do not sit well with anthropologists. Here we have groups where it would appear that in some cases they can and in others they cannot. I'm going to argue that the apparent discontinuity simply supports her overall view that we lack an "adequately specified theory of collective action whereby a groups of principals can organize themselves voluntarily to retains the residuals of their own efforts." I won't pretend to provide that theory but rather add more local dissection of specific cases.

Peter's (1987, 1994) has shown how, in postcolonial Botswana communal grazing lands became plagued with problems of open access after the newly independent government set up open "communal grazing lands" simply modeled after the colonial "tribal lands," without understanding how such lands were managed quite successfully during the precolonial era. In the Amazonian region one could expect and perhaps blame similar government insensitivity. However, it is exactly these government efforts to establish dominion, and thus use rights over lands that has sparked the territorial claims. These unresolved conflicts between rights of the state and the local indigenous ethnic groups provide us with the best understanding of the apparent paradox between claim and use.

Though an "institutional approach" is the sort of process and structure which the organizations seek to manage the large territorial claims, the initial negotiation to create acceptable "working relations" between the indigenous/ethnic groups and State are barely underway.   For that to take place there must be considerable change in the currently

asymmetrical order which governs their relations other claimants or potential stakeholders (e.g. the state, colonists, private enterprise, and often, environmental organizations).

The current recognized need to institutionalize broad territories has appeared only over the last 5-7 years as the scope of their territorial disputes have shifted from concern with colonists who occasionally flow and always trickle onto their lands to the current and intensive industrial expansion toward extraction of resources such as timber, minerals, and oil in Latin America.

. Though these forest resources, particularly timber, have been exploited for some time, Grainger (1987) illustrates a rapid current rise and anticipated future increase as supplies from Asia and the Pacific decrease and take on a smaller share of the world market. This has not gone unnoticed by local populations. Despite exaggerated and romantic images of untouched primitives being swept away by greedy capitalism, most indigenous peoples have been part of the market economy since the turn of the century. However, the current local surge to secure resources seems to be closely linked to their observations of rapidly increasing resource exploitation and their growing awareness of the value. Moreover, in addition to expanding their physical landscape, they also seek to shift the nature of ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969) as well.

So rather than try to analyze why small pockets of lands appear to mismanaged, I'll suggests a broader view -- one which utilizes the lens now being ground by many of the native Amazonian Indians organizations which have emerged over the last twenty years. I also assume that any image that appears is not a static portrait but rather a single frame arrested during a period of rapid change in Indian organizations' efforts to change the structure of their relations with the broad national society.

Most indigenous organizations, now express relatively new and sophisticated levels of socio-political analysis. From this they promote corresponding efforts to change the nature of their debate with the dominant non-indigenous society and reconfigure their ethnic boundaries. Land and resource rights, though only partial expressions of increasingly broad demands for self-determination and respect, have become the principle themes for that discourse.

Consequently, some aspects of the tenure regimes remain largely as political concerns characterized more by regular pushing, pulling, positioning and posturing than by clearly defined management plans and regular production schedules. Many locally-run land use projects, in turn, serve largely as expressions and demonstrations of changing local control over land and resources rather than as exercises in its management. Likewise, the recent claims for broad "territories" openly challenge the states' claims to the theoretically "open lands" and thus render management considerations premature.

Defining "Community": Place or Process?

One approach to the original question lies in defining the unit of analysis. How do we understand "community?" The term is generally synonymous with a bounded, named place or site. Yet many community-based programs are now managed through new regional organizations, thus leading analysis past simple "community development" to considerations of broad local empowerment by acknowledging the representative nature and legitimacy of the organizations.

Shifting "Economies"

For these organizations, changes in their understanding of community reflect shifts in the perceptions inter-ethnic relations as well as control over space and resources. While some entire communities and many individuals still retain and act on an earlier subordinate understanding of land and status, most of the leaders of the newly-formed ethnic federations, particualrly in their public discourse, illustrate new patterns of interpretation and subsequent action.

I find that a broad use of the term "economy" -- i.e. the organization, internal constitution, appointment of functions, of any complex unity -- helps to frame the shifts in epistemology which currently guide behavior. Until quite recently inter-ethnic relations were understood largely in terms a "moral economy," which carried with it a frame for interpreting inter-ethnic relations as well as norms and patterns of reciprocity regarding rights to land, resources and the fruits of production (Thompson 1992, Scott 1976). Though imbalanced and exploitative, these "whole-person", face-to-face patron-client ties and associated petty commodity exchange served to structure and guide interaction.

Now the emerging, younger political leadership in the Amazon, interpret their public position in terms which we could call "political economy," -- i.e. rules and practices resulting from current systems of production and distribution of wealth. This provides them with a new set of tools for understanding their social and economic positions, and illustrates a status which indigenous people now regard as unacceptable. It also identifies property which indigenous peoples now claim or reclaim -- land, resources, and culture.

However, as we noted, these public, political claims have not yet been negotiated into the sorts of practical "working relationships" which can guide the future use and distribution of community resources. This current search for political and economic parity helps to account for the gap between public proclamations which negate one order and local resource management projects which would affirm an alternative.

In brief, the "economies" used to interpret inter-ethnic relations are being redefined in response to the expanding economics of national development and changing demographics in the Amazon region. The previously dominant, moral economy has, to a large extent, either recede or collapsed in all but a few settings where missionaries or others provide essential goods and serves. For most indigenous peoples, particularly the leaders, the norms and rules of reciprocity which defined the moral economy and linked individuals to groups are giving way to political roles which are making groups more self-conscious and self-assertive along ethnic lines marked by new boundaries.

The moral economy, like any order, developed over time, and gradually assumed a set of norms, including rights regarding governance and access to land and resources. Those who now focus on their situation through the frame of a political economy first seek to alter roles and positions. They also hint at future norms and expectations for interaction with respect to social relations and the distribution of resources.

Ecuador as Illustration

Latin America, particularly the Amazon Basin, is an enormous patchwork of cultures and communities. But since the 17th century they have progressively shared a common status --"colonized peoples." Beginning largely in the 1970s, they acknowledged that status be referring to themselves as a generic category -- the pejorative term **Indio** (Bonfil 1981). More recently, and more important for the terms of this paper, indigenous groups throughout the Amazon Basin regions of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela now share common patterns of political organization, nonviolent political actions, and externally-funded local development projects. (APCOB 1994, Chirif, Garcia and Smith 1991, Smith 1983, Burger 1987, Brown 1994, *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 1984, COICA 1989a, 1989b, 1994).

Ecuador in some ways stands out in terms of its local organizations, political statements and actions, land use projects and international visibility, yet in more ways it simply highlights the broad pattern and political positions of much of the region. Communities and organizations there have undergone radical changes yet, in many ways remain at a critical transition in their relations with national and international institutions and agencies. This emerging pattern draws from experiments with new, unfamiliar actors. But it is also a reaction and rejection of past patterns of social order and dominance which they associated with a moral economy.

Development of a "Moral Economy " in the Ecuadorian Amazon
Community Land and Resources

Until quite recently, for many groups in the Ecuadorian Amazon, physical space -- land, forest and water -- was understood as a patchwork of kin-based settlements with borders defined and legitimized by human use and reinforced by spirit beings who were said to maintain intimate relations with members of the kin group. Within this space access and use were, and in many case are still governed by specific sets of rules and rights of usufruct. Though generally unwritten and often unspoken, the rules are widely understood and acknowledged.

The clearest boundaries are those associated with household gardens, or **chacras.** But there are also social maps and rules of traverse which extended onto the large expanses of relatively unmodified forest, streams and river used for hunting and fishing. By contrast to the adjacent Andean landscape where personal plots and community boundaries are marked in ways visible and obvious to western eyes, Amazonian land rights appear more amorphous. But, though squabbles are inevitable and trespass is common, most of this land -- the basis for subsistence and market production -- is clearly demarcated physically and socially.

Until the late 19th Century, this indigenous space was violated only by travellers, government officials and missionaries. In most cases their presence was sporadic and brief. The few permanent mission sites and government settlements were small and the residents rarely ventured onto indigenous lands. Nor were thy encouraged. Such inter-ethnic ties, therefore, had little impact on the indigenous residents' social and economic life or the land and resources needed to sustain it (Macdonald 1979, Muratorio 1991, Whitten 1981).

The Rubber Boom

However, as world demand for the Amazon's rubber increased in the late 19th century, merchants travelled up and down every tributary of the Upper Amazon in search of rubber trees and Indians to tap and drain them.. Though the rubber boom produced exploitative and deplorable working conditions throughout the Amazon, in many the upper tributaries distant from the areas easily navigated by motor launch and marginal to the large-scale market centers like Iquitos, labor exploitation was less violent.   Written and oral accounts of the rubber boom on in the Upper Amazon illustrate conditions which ranged from passive patron-client relations to forced labor and obligatory population shifts (e.g. Chevalier 1982, Varese 1972).   In the Ecuadorian Amazon the more violent forms of labor acquisition appear to have been rare (Macdonald 1979, Muratorio 1991). Rubber merchants generally acquired Indian labor through debt servitude.

Generally, a merchant gives small inexpensive gifts and later escalates the value of these presentations to include essentials such as cloth, axes, and shotguns. In most cases these were paid for in rubber. Despite the obvious economic exploitation, relations were often initiated by the Indians themselves. Patron in the Upper Napo at the time supplied necessary material goods as improved transportation and avenues of incidental trade and informal exchange gradually diminished. They also served as essential mediators or brokers between Indians and institutions and individuals of the broader national society. Until the mid-twentieth century, they negotiated almost all relations between Indians and travellers. Likewise, patrons brokered relations with national and local civil authorities, particularly legal problems or civil disputes.

As patrons settled into the Upper Amazon they altered the nature of inter-ethnic relations. They had far more regular and intimate contact with the indigenous population than did the previous authorities -- governors or priests who, during earlier periods, irregularly visited the rain forest. As indigenous trade networks provided fewer and fewer manufactured goods, the patron became the principal supplier of such items and, in turn, the principal recipient for most valuable raw materials. While mediating the exchange of manufactured goods and raw materials he also became a vital intermediary between Indians and both local and national authorities.

Impact on Economics, Settlement Pattern and the Moral Economy

In the Upper Amazon labor performed for the patron generally did not radially alter the indigenous life style. Neither the nature of the work nor the time allocated to perform it demanded drastic reallocation of time and energy. Panning for gold or tapping for rubber were easily accommodated into the dominant subsistence-based life.

Nor did this labor force a restructuring of the residence pattern. In many parts of the Upper Amazon patrons did not control exploitation rights to land; they only exercised economic influence over the workers. Individuals were not relocated to new locations along a river to gather gold or rubber. They simply were obliged to exchange these products with their patron. Much of the labor was performed within the settlement or during periods of temporary residence elsewhere.

Indigenous residence patterns were easily adapted to accommodate such work into periodic or annual schedules. Likewise, existing concepts of territoriality, which served to control exploitation of fish and game, were easily extended to territories for gathering gold and rubber. Rights of usufruct were limited to those of the kin-based settlements and encroachments by outsiders were sharply prohibited. In addition, labor expended to the patron did not radically alter existing subsistence schedules or other aspects of resource and time allocation.

In summary, the norms and rules of reciprocity which generated a moral economy required only minor shifts in the indigenous allocation of time to meet the demands imposed by the patron. They did not dominate the subsistence economic patterns and therefore did not replace the dominant mode of production. Likewise, although the relationships constituted a shift in some of the social relations of production, they did not eliminate existing patterns of social organization and prestige.

A new inter-ethnic order was established but the social and economic patterns which had generated much the existing indigenous social order remained unmodified and subsistence patterns remained intact.

The cluster of highly personalized duties and expectations nonetheless formed the basis of a "moral economy." Though centered around land, customs of land use, and entitlement to its produce, it did not threaten the basic subsistence, social organization, or traditional land rights. The interactions were regulated by a normative code, patterns of expected behavior, and rules of reciprocity which developed over time into asymmetric but nonetheless symbiotic relations.

Period Two
Interpretation Through Political Economy

Beginning in the 1960s two influences again altered the lives and expectations of indigenous peoples in Ecuador and other parts of the Upper Amazon -- colonization and increased education. Colonists, with an intrusive impersonal presence, effectively ruptured the moral economy and signaled a qualitative shift in inter-ethnic relations. Previously, outside interests rested mainly on the region's inhabitants -- as souls for religion conversion or as sources of cheap labor. Colonists, however, regarded Indian communities as, at best, irrelevant and, more often, obstacles to their expansion. The colonist's singular concern was access to land. As such, they were more concerned with displacing its occupants rather than negotiating relationships with them.

Indians recognized that inter-ethnic ties were no longer limited to individual accommodation to a patron or passive resistance to missionaries and government authorities. The transactions of the moral economy -- previously matters of small change and part-time labor— were being replaced by impersonal individuals, agencies and interests. So the indigenous peoples began to redraw their map of ethnic boundaries and reinterpret the nature of inter-ethnic relations.

The norms and patterns of reciprocity which previously linked patrons to clients had been mainly dyadic -- they linked individuals to individuals or single families. By the 1960s such ties were limited largely to some of the relationships with Evangelical and Catholic missionaries. For the majority, however, tight personal inter-ethnic bonds diminished or disappeared as relationships shifted to impersonal private enterprises, state bureaucracies and

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communities of colonists all of whom threatened the previously secure rights to land and resources.

At the same time, increased education to some of the younger indigenous peoples brought exposure to new explanations regarding the general situation of Latin America and the indigenous position within it -- e.g. Dependency Theory, Liberation Theology, analyses of the role multilateral corporations and banks. Introduced through secondary schools, universities and informal exposure to new social movements, political parties, and non-governmental organizations, these ideas led many Indians to restructure their perceptions of the world, leading to interpretations which focused on political economy.

Ecuador

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s the Ecuadorian indigenous response shifted from personalized, individual negotiations to broad group political actions. The indigenous people, sometimes aided by outsiders but largely on their own, began to restructure political boundaries to accommodate themselves better to the changing physical landscape. They began to organize into groups specifically oriented toward challenging the new powers in the region and creating political space for themselves.

Ethnic Federations

Initiated in the Ecuadorian Amazon, these new organizations, often referred to as "ethnic federations "(Smith 1983) have now established themselves throughout the Amazon basin. At present, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia contain the largest and most active organizations. Brazil, though nominally allied the National Indian Union (UNI) has not yet achieved the degree of agreed upon unity which exists in the Upper Amazon. Now these communities have organized into local and regional ethnic federations, national pan-tribal units, and, most recently, international organizations (Cultural Survival Quarterly 1984; Smith 1984, 1985). They view themselves as independent units, working to position themselves within the national political arena rather than observing or serving these powers from the outside.

Most federations maintain three primary concerns: 1) the defense of their member communities' rights to land and resources and; 2) the expansion and strengthening of their organizations; 3) the maintenance of their unique ethnic identity. In many ways they resemble other popular organizations; however, their insistence on maintaining their distinct cultural identity differentiates them from labor unions and similar social sectors in Latin America.

Today, ethnic federations are recognized social and political forces, and have thus created niches for themselves within plural national societies. Recently, there have been efforts to incorporate them as the logical institutional link for work with development and environmental agencies (Wali and Davis 1992, Inter-American Development Bank 1992, Macdonald 1994).

Ethnic Federations in the Ecuadorian Oriente

Latin America's first ethnic federations first developed among the Shuar Indians in Ecuador's Southern Oriente during the early 1960's. Later the Shuar's example spurred similar organization among several young Quichua Indian teachers from the Tena-Archidona region.

FOIN and the Shuar Federation, like the numerous organizations which followed their example, were similar. Their actions reflected a significant shift in their sense of place in

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society. For example, during the first part of nearly every meeting or assembly, and in local training and recruitment sessions within communities, the organizations' leadership first focused on "an analysis of the problems and indigenous perspective" before moving towards any resolutions, programs or administrative work. This formal critical analysis reflects their move away from dependency and toward locating themselves within a broader social and political landscape.

Agrarian Reform and Colonization

In the Amazon region, the product of national agrarian reform was regional colonization. In response, Indian communities initially sought some security by requesting title to their lands. However, the national agrarian reform agency, IERAC, as well the later (1978) National Institute for the Colonization of the Ecuadorian Oriente (INCRAE) were notoriously slow to provide title to Indian communities anywhere in the Amazon region, particularly in Napo province. By 1978, adding to a chorus of concerns over colonization were complaints about restrictions on forest use established by the Ministry of Agriculture's forestry division and the establishment of ecological reserves through the national parks office. By declaring state control over large tracts of forest lands, these conservation initiatives were perceived as further threats to Indian land rights, and potential impediments to land titling.

Such concerns led to a quantum leap in local organization and a shift in posture. At an August 1980 meeting in Puyo Ecuador, representatives from five of the newly-formed ethnic federations of the Amazon region, as well as numerous invited national and international guests, met for three days. The major concern, again, was the threat posed by colonization and its implementing agency IERAC. However, rather than continue requesting title to lands, the representatives called for elimination of Colonization Law from within Laws of Agrarian Reform, and demanded the return of lands taken by the missions from indigenous communities. To promote these issues, the individual federations joined to form the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE).

In summary, by early 1980's, Ecuador's Amazonian Indians had organized previously disparate communities into ethnic federations; these in turn united to form regional and national organizations. To an extent greater than any other Latin American country the Ecuadorian Indians' response to colonization and other external threats to their land and resources was the mobilization of a new national political sector.

A Few Ecuadorian Incidents

Several recent events illustrate changing attitudes. They also suggest a status indigenous peoples seek to assume with regard to land and resource rights.

1). During the mid-1970s a North American agronomist designed an integrated land use system for the fragile tropical forest ecosystem of the Ecuadorian Amazon. Combining subsistence agriculture and small-animal husbandry, he argued that this model farm would meet a family's subsistence and market economic needs indefinitely, and would do so on an ecologically sustainable basis.

At a 1978 seminar the schema was presented to an audience of national agrarian reform officials, land use specialists and representatives of the region's indigenous organizations. It drew nods of approval from most and a few, obligatory technical questions from colleagues. The indigenous representatives rejected it summarily.

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Indian leaders regarded the project's land-use technology as irrelevant; they opposed the size of the model. It was designed for a 50-hectare plot, the standard holding awarded to colonists by the government agrarian reform agency -- the National Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization (IERAC). That agency, Indians argued, had encouraged colonists into the Amazon region and defined appropriate land units without ever taking into consideration traditional indigenous claims or their future needs.

2). Four years later the director of Ecuador's National Forestry Directorate met with three leaders of the same Indian organization. He enthusiastically invited local indigenous participation in conservation programs encouraged by new forestry legislation. Specifically, the director suggested that Indian organizations collaborate by nominating members to serve as guards within protected forest lands.

The Indian representatives rejected the offer. They left the meeting after politely indicating that their organizations should have taken part in the formal meetings which determined new land use rules, rather than assisting in their subsequent implementation.

3). In 1988, a new government took office, led by President Rodrigo Borja. He selected three close advisors who set aside time -- every Tuesday from eleven a.m. to one p.m. -- to meet with representatives of the Indian organizations. Indian attendance, however, was irregular and unenthusiastic.

4). Eight months later, three of these indigenous leaders accompanied one member of the advisory committee and the Assistant Director of IERAC to a small jungle Indian village, Sarayacu, to negotiate a dispute between that community and encroaching oil exploration teams. Supported by over 150 community members, the Indians sequestered the government officials for several days.

Amidst constant national press and radio attention to the "kidnappings," the Indians and government officials worked until they finalized a broad agreement -- referred to as the Sarayacu Accords. It focused on land rights, resource control, bi-lingual education and development programs. Ironically, these were the same issues which made up the agenda for the sparsely attended government meetings.

5). By the early 1990s these representatives began to introduce claims for large tracts of land, referred to as territories. These land issues served as the focus of a June 1990 general non-violent uprising, the *Levantminto General.* In late 1992 government failure to respond to demands sparked a long, formal march from the Upper Amazonian town of Puyo to the national capital, Quito. The protests produced a presidential declaration recognizing their claims and promising titles. Similar political actions and subsequent presidential decrees occurred in Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Bolivia during roughly the same period.

6). Paralleling their social actions and tied to the expanding international and national interest in preserving the Ecuadorian rain forests, these organizations, beginning largely in the mid- to late-1980s and expanding through that decade and into the next, solicited and received funds for community-based land use programs. Along with it came international linkages and increased public profile as stewards of fragile ecosystems. Indirectly, this opened considerable political space.

The incidents and activities highlight the on-going evolution of the Indian organizations that now pervade much of South America's political arena. Previously, the nature and tenor of relations between most sectors of the national society was characterized by

clear lines of difference, subordination, public deference, and related norms and patterns of reciprocity. These have now been broadly challenged in a search for parity within the national society. However, it is also done in response to opportunities, or lack thereof, provided by different national administrations and related programs.

Ethnic Federations and Government Programs

This chronological section of the paper illustrates how indigenous organizations have maintained a "one-track" approach to their goals. When there is an "open door" with the government they work heavily to influence policy on the broadest possible level. When the doors close, they seek alternative means —international alliances and with it some of the conservation and development priorties and opportunities they provide. As we will see this understanding allows one to take some "community-based" forestry projects out of the broad domain of "common property management" and into that of "short term political strategies."

1980-1984 *The Roldos/Hurtado Administration*
Open Doors: From Opposing Colonization to Promoting Land Rights
During this period, as a challenge to IERAC and a demonstration of their perceived land rights, the organizations declared that IERAC should recognize and title land along traditional community boundaries, rather than establish its own criteria. That is, they should acknowledge and formalize an exiting order rather than divide territory as if it were state property. During this period, frustrated by IERAC's lack of response, some of the Ecuadorian Quichua settlements began to physically demarcate some of their community boundaries, thus initiating a controversial process referred to as *auto-linderacion*

Despite expressions of discontent with government institutions and criticism of their policies and practices, relations between Indians and government were direct and generally cordial. The Hurtado government established the first Office of Indian Affairs, a single two-person office within the Ministry of Social Welfare with a mandate to work through the ministry to provide assistance to Indian communities, including support for land titling. Though empowered and funded to do very little, the office was staffed by progressive social scientists who regarded themselves as supporters of indigenous issues and maintained regular contact with the leadership. At the same time the government expanded the modest funding for the Central Bank's small-loan fund program, FODERUMA, established in the late 1970s. Foderuma was supposed to provide grants and low interest loans to small holders. At the time the Indian organizations regarded both agencies as service organizations which aided and strengthened the federations, however limited their support.

Previously the organizations were aided almost exclusively by international NGOs and similar donor agencies. This enabled a degree of autonomy and independence but, as some leaders suggested, such funding indirectly distanced them from the political arenas they were working to expand and enter. So as the organizations began to work more closely with government institutions, they were drawn more closely into national politics, thus increasing their national visibility and status.

In 1981 the Ecuadorian congress passed a set of forestry laws -- the *Ley Forestal y de Conservation de Areas Naturales y Vida Silvestre.* The laws established forest management as a national priority and encouraged the development of forestry programs, especially among small farmers. More important, they declared exempt from the laws of agrarian reform protective forests, lands in permanent use for forest resources, and those with established plans for reforestation. Formally at least, this put forestry and conservation programs on a par with more environmentally destructive programs such as cattle raising, and thus encouraged programs like community forestry.

But at the time there was neither interest not agreement by the Indian organizations. As illustrated by the incident mentioned earlier, they regarded the legislation as yet another government effort to exercise control over their land and resources without consulting with the organizations. Rather than focusing on ways to benefit from the laws, the organizations were more concerned with how the laws were drafted and promulgated.

1984-1988 *Leon Febres Cordero:*
Closed Doors: Political Opposition, Community-based Projects and Auto-Linderation

Beginning in 1984, government leaders under strongly neo-Liberal President Leon Febres Cordero advocated unrestrained economic activities for the private sector, encouraged colonization in the Amazonian region and publicly opposed the ethnic federations and other popular organizations. The previously benign *Oficina de Asuntos Indigenas* was elevated to the status of a directorate *{Direction National de Poblaciones Indigenas del Ecuador)* and, to the outrage of the elected Indian organizations, was officially declared it "the technical-operational agency in charge of defining and applying policy and executing programs and projects for the organization and integrated development of the indigenous populations of Ecuador (Amanecer Indio 1985:c)."

Armed with this broad, formal mandate, the national directorate quickly assumed many the roles which the ethnic federations had been working to establish for themselves. To further diminish the status of the independent ethnic federations, the government encouraged new, "alternative" organizations. Often made up of only a handful of self-appointed Indian leaders supportive of the government, these organizations suddenly appeared in many areas and were quickly awarded formal recognition, *personeria juridica* (Amanecer Indio 1985:a).

Also supporting government efforts, Foderuma began to provide funds to the newly-formed organizations or otherwise weakened the established federations by funding communities directly. However, many Foderuma employees remained committed to the previous policies of support, and often informed the Indians of their orders. Foderuma officials informally told FOIN that these efforts were to keep the communities from talking about broader land issues and to stimulate or exacerbate inter-community fighting. One official stated that the use of funds were not a concern; the communities would probably waste them, but they would hamper or destroy FOIN's alliances.

These initiatives functioned in two ways. First, the established Indian organizations accurately interpreted the actions as efforts to establish government hegemony by weakening the power of the federations. This strengthened their opposition; the Directorate's and Foderuma's actions met with strong public rejection by the older, independent Indian organizations (Ibid). In addition, initial offers to buy political loyalty through economic favors

to "alternative organizations," were followed by a sharp decline in oil prices. Consequently, government funds were severely curtailed and Foderuma was unable to fulfill most of its promises.

Second, however ineffective the direct government actions, the maneuvering increased, or at least highlighted long-standing disputes and tensions between communities. These conflicts were frequently played out in federation politics, illustrating institutional weaknesses and slowing many broad program advances.

The conflict with the Leon government also affected land use patterns. This was significant shift. Rather than simply having to cope with displacement by colonists, the organizations realized that they were not only moving away from an expanding frontier, but ceding recently valued resources to others. Many now saw, quite quickly, that these resources represented value to anyone. While the organizations were not a position to undertake resource use independently, they were clearly not ready to hand them over either. They needed time to consider what to do -- resource management allowed this as did territories.

The 1981 forestry laws were implemented by the National Forestry Directorate (DINAF) which, like IERAC, was a sector of the Ministry of Agriculture. As relationships between IERAC and the Indians communities deteriorated or halted, Indians viewed DINAF and its laws with increased suspicion, labeling it an agency which primarily supported the interests of logging companies and forest concessionaires. Their suspicions were supported by the Ministry of Agriculture's expressed refusal to meet, let alone negotiate with Indian organizations.

While IERAC halted all communal land titling, government-awarded concessions for African Palm plantations increased and expanded rapidly, often on Indian lands (Hoy 1985a, 1985b, 1985c, Kirk 1986). By 1985, the expansion of African Palm plantations, and the tactics used to enable their growth, provoked another series of outcries from the regional and national Indian organizations.(Amanecer Indio 1985 b, CONFENIAE 1985a, 1985b; Latin American Weekly Report 1985) and was criticized sharply in a broadly circulated public document and related publications (CONFENIAE 1985, Carrion and Cuvi 1985).

An Indigenous Response

By 1986, two years of a conservative government led by Leon Febres Cordero, produced an atmosphere in which popular actions of any sort were regarded as a threat to the state and were quickly and often violently halted. With unprecedented numbers of heavily equipped police visible on the streets and sharp public statements by the government, rumors were quickly fueled. Apolitical NGOs and other groups remained quiet out of fear that some form of government violence would be visited on the relatively peaceful country.

By contrast, CONFENIAE's position became even more militant. The Indian organizations, those who represented a genuine challenge to the status quo, were among the most active and visible social sectors during this period. Ironically, though clearly intended to weaken the grass-roots groups, government efforts were more successful in supporting and fulfilling any "conspiracy theory" beliefs within the organizations and thus strengthening their internal solidarity.

Moving deftly within a delicate political atmosphere, the Indian organizations continued to hold public meetings and maintained a relatively high public profile. In fact, through congressional contacts, they held two outspoken assemblies in the main salon of the National Congress.

At their 1986 Congress CONFENIAE, faced with a government which rejected their demands and refused to meet with them, the organization presented a platform with a significant shift in tactics and posture.

Auto-linderacion

Rather then continue to ask IERAC to title indigenous lands, CONFENIAE resolved to oppose completely any further colonization, end titling of lands to colonists as well as industry and, more important, staunchly defend the area's increasing movement towards "self-demarcation" *(auto-lindercion)*. Frustrated by IERAC's failure to demarcate and title any new territory, Indians simply undertook the surveying themselves. The hope was that IERAC would be sparked to undertake the formal work or that the Indians' lines would be accepted and formalized by that government office.

In addition, and more important as a potential stimulus to future community-based forestry, the Indians stated that they would take charge of overall development programs within the communities.

From Political Organization to Resource Management: The "Era of the Projects"

Until the late 1980s most of the work within the communities consisted of institution building through meetings and assemblies at the local, regional and national level. However, Foderuma's promises and their occasional fulfillment sparked concerns, identified institutional problems, and in any cases served to divide communities or exacerbate exiting or latent conflicts. Many of the communities began to challenge the organizations, some for personal or petty political reasons and others because they felt that objective criticism was fully justified. After nearly a decade of organization building, the communities were beginning to question the exclusive focus on organization.

However, a relatively new aspect had also entered the arena, the extensive concern with the resource base -- particualrly timber, minerals, and petroleum. They were quite quickly perceived to perceived to have value which had not been suggested before. New sets of rules were needed, one which went beyond accommodating colonists but which could provide access to newly-valued commodities.

At the same time a growing, international environmental movement also took a relatively sudden but extremely intense interest in the resources rainforests of the Amazon. Following suite, Ecuadorian public awareness of environmental issues also rose sharply during the 1960s, pushed by local NGO's such as Fundacion Natura and other environmental groups. Several of the international organizations included indigenous peoples among the world's "endangered species" and some began to promote indigenous peoples are premier environmental managers. National and international demands to save the rain forests were accompanied by a significant increase in international funds available for local projects. Indian leaders at the time frequently referred to the shift as the "era of the projects," and received

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funds from a variety of sources. In late 1987 FOIN, for its part, began the country's first indigenous effort to link land tenure to claims of sustainable land use.

FOIN and Forest Management

Though the need for natural resource management was latent, the immediate spur appeared in March 1987. An earthquake in the Amazonian region swept away a sector of the only road which connected eastern Napo province with the capital. Within a few weeks the government cut a new road from the town of Loreto to the Hollin River. Underway slowly for several years, it was finished rapidly and cut through relatively unmodified tropical forest dotted with Indian communities, most of which were members of FOIN. Only nine of the approximately thirty communities within the area held land titles; four others had been demarcated but not titled. So the lands of approximately 1/2 of the communities were suddenly exposed to colonists invasion.

The area's scattered Indian households quickly cleared forest frontage and planted small patches of pasture to demonstrate their presence along the road. This small demonstration of possession soon escalated to extensive logging as individual purchasers and wood product companies bought up any logs and sawn lumber visible from the roadside, and then maneuvered to obtain timbering concessions for additional cutting in the communities. The offers led to internal disputes in several communities as Indians maneuvered against each other to get the cash from lumber sales, regardless of ridiculously low prices. In one case a community sought to split its territory in two parts, a dispute which made future land titling quite difficult.

While some Quichuas along the road sold off their timber and signed concessionaire agreements for additional cutting, FOIN's directors recognized that the ridiculously low prices were unacceptable and that extensive logging threatened these communities' future resource base. But though FOIN, more than any outside organization, was positioned to dissuade Indians from their economically short-sighted decisions, they could not simply tell people to give up an income-generating activity. At the vary least, they had to be an alternative. They argued that resource management project would generate income for the future and would provide an economic base for the region's children. The project also gave FOIN an opportunity to provide some of the much-demanded services requested by its affiliates.

In brief, there was every reason for the organization to take immediate advantage of this challenge and initiate a program of resource management. It served an immediate obvious need, indeed a crisis. It was also a way to strengthen the organization by promoting secure tenure. Likewise the project provided an internationally acceptable means to confront a hostile government through selective use of environmental concerns to pursue a consistent set of social and political goals during period when these were challenged by the national government and local communities alike. Such motivation, however, was not sufficient to institutionalize a technical and administrative program.

Project Letimarin

In March 1988 FOIN began to design the program. The first concern was political "sustainablity" so they focused largely on their principle concerns -- land tenure and institution building.   To strengthen FOIN's role in the eyes of the government and the communities, the organization assumed a prominent role in the design and initial implementation of the project. In October 1988, FOIN presented the research results, as well as a series of recommended

actions, to the national forestry directorate, DINAF. The report stressed that, although DINAF was supposed to control logging in the area, its presence was minimal and often contradicted its specified purpose. FOIN also presented the report to the national agrarian reform agency, and included a formal request for land titles and a halt to additional road construction until a rational resource management program could be established.

However, FOIN did not actively follow up on its initial efforts. A significant shift in the organization's focus followed the 1988 election of a more progressive government led by Rodrigo Borja.

3. 1989-1992 *The Borja Government*
Open Door: Expanding "Auto-Liberacion" from Communities to Ethnic Territories, and a Shift to Regional Planning

Beginning in 1988 and with the expressed goal of demarcating Huaorani lands, teams from each of the surrounding Quichua federations -- OPIP from the southwest, FOIN from the northwest and FECUNAE from the north -- began to physically cut lines in the forest to establish a 600 km. perimeter around Huaorani land. At the same, particularly in the case of OPIP, they began to define the borders of their own broad ethnic territory. Using the Huaorani territory as one edge, the organizations established for the first time a sense of ethnic territory. In doing so they moved from a position of securing specific community borders from colonists' potential claims to defining a larger unit over which they claimed a set of rights.

Though unspecified, rights were, according to CONFENIAE leaders, not exclusive title but a recognition of traditional rights over land resources. The exercise of these rights would be negotiated in the future. For the moment, the concern was recognition that rights existed and thus provide a basis for future discussions, such as the use of resources -- oil, minerals, and forests which lay within the territory.

In brief, the organizations had made a quantum leap in their position in relation to the state. It was no longer a matter of demonstrating possession through use; such arguments assumed that the State had the right to place conditions on Indian lands. The organizations, by shifting to broader territorial demands, were thus changing the rules with regard to land use as well as its boundaries.

Resource management projects, therefore, no longer carried the same weight. It was no longer a priority to demonstrate land use. Interest quickly shifted to a much larger arena. Consequently most time and energy, as well as the general institutional focus, was relocated. This is reflected in the interest and attention paid to particular projects.

As part of an organization's portfolio, projects carried enormous symbolic weight. The represented the legitimacy which the Leon government's move to alternative organization sought to end. As such, projects were highly coveted, and illustrated by FOIN's demands that Project PUMAREN(renamed from Project Letimaren) remain under the control of the federation rather than the communities. Moreover by dealing primarily with symbolic weight rather than production units they justified a lack of interest and concern with the day-to-day functioning and short-term results of the project.

Since then, enthusiasm for the project on the part of the federation diminished further. There was far more interest in the on-going but recent surge in the politics of positioning.

Two major events dominated -- the dramatic events leading up the Sarayacu Accords and the national "Levantamiento General," or general uprising. Both took the full time of FOIN's directorate and frequently maintained the time and attention of the technical team as well.

At present a variety of activities were still underway in the area,but progress is still slow. NGOS meanwhile seek alternative international markets for PUMAREN products. The project staff, as well as the communities have received support and advice from several experienced and enthusiastic technicians who have worked with the Yanesha Forestry Cooperative. Nevertheless there is a progressive loss of interest by the organization and an increasing sense of cynicism on the part of the communities.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn dawn heavily from observation on a specific country and project, nonetheless it suggests that the events reflect a current regional pattern. It would appear that after a burst of initial enthusiasm, and as community-forestry project shifted to the details of planning and implementation, the presence and support of the indigenous leadership diminished and focused instead on intense national and regional political activities. However, as suggested earlier, this in not the time to place judgement on the organizations or suggest that community-based forest management is impossible under any circumstances. At present, for many groups it may be difficult to combine the political priorities of the organizations with the technical and administrative work needed to utilize technical skills and undertake such work at a community level. This review is included to illustrate the institutional priorities, largely political, which must be met and satisfied before moving toward effective management of common property resources.

While it would be heartening to suggest that the two actions can take place at the same time, that is simply not the case at the moment, clearly not in the Upper Napo. Most reports of similar project work from other areas does not appear to have advanced beyond planning and training, and thus place many projects in analogous situations. However, the activities of CECOIN seem to belie that;however that project lies largely under the control of APCOB, not CIDOB. By contrast the case of the Mennomeniee situation appears to suggest that one should wait. But perhaps the best illustration of this transition now comes from one of the region's better known groups -- the Kayapo. Since their demonstration for land rights to an international audience took place in 1986 in Altamira Brazil., they have aggressively, successfully, and publicly worked to alter their political and economic status. In doing so they have opened the doors of the Brazilian government and the world press. At the same time, and the distress of many observers, they have sold off timber and mining rights on their land to Brazilian entrepreneurs. Amassing considerable wealth, they now own lavish houses, fly in their own private planes, and employ non-Indian servants. In brief and in addition to their political status, by the standards of some Brazilian elites, they have obtained economic as well as political parity. Having achieved their primary goal -- parity -- they, at an early 1995 iter-community assembly voted to expel all miner and timber concessionaires, and to manage their hard won resource base. As such they have achieved economic parity as well.

Most of the other Latin American projects, however, remain at the planning stages. Planning is an essential phase of all projects. Similar situations mark most indigenous resource management projects, including those using some of the most sophisticated electronic and similar technology available, as illustrated in the Winter 1995 **Cultural Survival; Quarterly** "Geomatics: Who Needs It?" Though using highly advanced mapping and land use technologies, most are still demarcating or planning future work. Few have evolved to become effective production units or successful enterprises.

To suggest that such a broad range of projects simply find themselves at the same stage of project development by coincidence pushes the limits of credibility. The similarities suggest and support the initial observation. Though now evaluating their situation through a broad political economic frame, the organizations and communities have not yet moved to operationilize that understanding. That is not to suggest that they cannot not will not, but simply that they have not at present. The point is that we are placing development within a larger arena, with multiple factors involved. Despite desires by international observers, support groups and local communities to witness even more rapid advances to resource management, it does not appear to be imminent. Though potentially discouraging this situation need not cause a loss of perspective. The changes in status and role which have in come about in many indigenous communities since the appearance of local organizations illustrates some of the most successful and non-violent social change in the hemisphere, if not in the world. These efforts should be recognized and applauded for what they are and where they have taken indigenous peoples, not elevated falsely or denigrated prematurely for what they are not.