

Nicolle P. Etchart

Department of Geography

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With the generous support of the Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowship for Incoming Graduate Students, I was able to travel to Ecuador for one month to advance the fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation on forest governance in Ecuador's northern Amazon. My research focuses on the interactions of regulatory, rule-based forest protection such as the designation of protected areas (PA), with voluntary, market-inspired policy instruments such as payments for ecosystem services (PES). I analyze Ecuador's policy mix of PES and PA approaches to determine the effectiveness of the policy combination, and its effects on both the forests and the actors involved.



To protect forests, states in the global South have traditionally set up PAs. Now they are turning to innovative PES schemes aimed at reducing tropical deforestation. PES are voluntary, contract-based financial incentives between resource users or buyers (e.g. states) and resource providers (e.g. forest landholders) conditional on agreed rules of natural resources management. They can –as is often the case in the global South– be used in combination with the more traditional regulatory framework of PAs. In fact, “policy mixes” of PES and PA approaches are proving to be more effective at reducing deforestation than a rule-based PA policy approach alone, but little is known about what make them effective nor how. In my dissertation research, I



study (1) what makes this policy combination effective, and (2) what are its effects on both the forests and the actors involved. In particular, I investigate three hypotheses: first, that the inclusion of PES to the policy mix strengthens compliance with weakly enforced laws by extending the visibility and reach of the state onto private and communal lands within and outside the state-space of PAs, and by shifting the responsibility of monitoring and enforcing compliance to individuals; second, that a greater emphasis on PES incentives is

achieving compliance with greater political feasibility; and third, that though these policy mixes may more effectively protect forests in the short term, it does not transform PES program participants into empowered actors of conservation and therefore risks effective conservation over the long term. I investigate these questions and hypotheses using the empirical case of *Socio Bosque*, the flagship incentive-based forest conservation initiative of the government of Ecuador.

This fieldwork tour in Ecuador was my third, and it was particularly fruitful because I was able to conduct a portion of it together with my dissertation advisor, Lisa Naughton, and a long-term research collaborator from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, Margaret Holland. The three of us have collaborated as a research team alongside Ecuadorian collaborators in Conservation International and Ecolex, a Quito-based environmental nonprofit that focuses on legal issues. Together, our team researches different aspects of Ecuador's national PES program, Socio Bosque. Socio Bosque is a contract-based forest conservation incentive program that pays landholders to conserve forested land on their properties for a period of twenty years. Launched in 2008, the program has added more than 1.4 million hectares of private and communally owned land¹ to Ecuador's 8.2 million hectares of state-protected land. In 2010, the program made the contested decision to start paying individuals and communities residing in state-managed protected areas so as to bolster existing regulations on forest use in these PAs. Many policy experts criticize paying for conservation in already protected land, arguing that this is money wasted and/or confers legitimacy to those occupying public lands. Others counter that these forests are protected only on favor. Nonetheless, today 33%² of Ecuador's continental territory is now under protection through some governance mechanism³. The expansion of this "carrots and sticks" policy mix approach to forest governance in Ecuador has brought ever more communities and individual landholders into closer contact with the Ecuadorian government and with the Ministry of the Environment in particular. The Mellon funds allowed me to join the research team this summer on a fieldwork tour in which we met with government personnel in the Ministry of the Environment and the Socio Bosque program and with three rural communities in the northeastern Amazon to discuss



¹ This includes forested land, highland *páramos*, and mangroves. See <http://sociobosque.ambiente.gob.ec/> for more information.

² Ministerio del Ambiente, 2016. Mapa Interactivo Ambiental. Available at <http://mapainteractivo.ambiente.gob.ec/>. Last accessed 26 Apr 2016.

³ For context, in 2016 14.7% of global terrestrial land was under protection, with countries in the developed world averaging 11.6% of land under conservation. The United States conserves 12.97% of its terrestrial land (IUCN and UNEP-WCMC (2016). The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) [On-line], April 2016, Cambridge, UK: UNEP-WCMW. Available at www.protectedplanet.net. Last accessed 27 Oct 2017).

these changes in Ecuador's forest governance and their experiences with the new policy mix approach.

This fieldwork tour was particularly timely because it also allowed us to hold focus groups with communities who had experienced a suspension in their conservation payments from Socio Bosque. In 2015, Ecuador suffered a strong economic crisis that sharply reduced the funds available for the forest conservation program. Additionally in early 2016, an earthquake of 7.8 magnitude rocked the Ecuadorian coast and had devastating direct consequences for coastal towns and indirect consequences for the entire country that was already facing a strong economic crunch. Strapped for cash, Socio Bosque suspended its payments to program participants beginning in October of 2015 and wasn't able to begin catching up with their payment backlog until mid March of 2017, one and a half years later. Some participants have been without payments for two years. Even so, program participants continued to be legally bound to their conservation contracts and were expected to continue to uphold their forest conservation commitments. As expected, during our meetings with communities, disgruntled program participants expressed their concerns and frustrations. Many of them spoke about their waning trust in the government. For many participants, their initial experience with the Socio Bosque program had been one of the first positive interactions with the Ministry of the Environment. Some expressed that this was the first time they felt that the government was beginning to care about people and not just trees when it came to conservation. The suspension in payments was rapidly eroding this fledgling trust, and many participants were eager to take a closer look at the legal stipulations of their contracts. Our meetings with Socio Bosque and Ministry of the

Environment personnel allowed us to get a sense of the frustration on their end, as well. Faced with angry program participants and scrambling to secure a budget line from central government, the Socio Bosque program underwent a reorganization that included a new Executive Director of the program and a sharply reduced staff, as well as a shuffling of responsibilities that shifted much of the direct interaction and contract management to provincial offices of the Ministry of the Environment.



We continue to track the evolution of the program and maintain contact with the communities we have worked with for the past three years in the northeastern Amazonian province of Sucumbíos. In combination with other sources of funding (including other fellowships from IRIS), the Mellon funds have allowed me to push this research program forward in very productive ways. This fieldwork directly informed a Fulbright DDRA proposal that has been successfully funded and I will now be embarking on a longer fieldwork period of

twelve months in Ecuador that will allow me to extend my research to other sites both in the Amazon and along the northeastern coast. Additionally, the community focus group findings on the frustrations expressed by participants regarding the missed payments has motivated our research team to apply for an NSF Rapid grant to analyze what happened to the forest cover and to participants' motivation to conserve and their trust in government after the suspension of the conservation payments. Much of the PES literature to date has focused on seller compliance (i.e. the compliance of the landholders receiving the payments), but few studies have looked at what happens when the buyer stops complying. Analyzing what happens when the money runs out has important conservation implications because many PES initiatives and policy mixes are deployed in developing countries with weak institutions and fragile economies.

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