

Working Paper 2016-12

Implementing Eco-Social Policies: Barriers and Opportunities

A Preliminary Comparative Analysis

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September 2016



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Acronyms

CO₂	Carbon dioxide
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FONAFIFO	Fondo de Financiamiento Forestal de Costa Rica (Costa Rican Forestry Finance Fund)
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICCN	Institut Congolaise pour la Conservation de l'Environnement (Congolese Institute for the Conservation of the Environment)
ITT	Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputin
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
PSA	Pago por Servicios Ambientales (Payment for Ecosystem Services)
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
SDI	Social Development Index
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dunja Krause and Pascal van Griethuysen, who have triggered my reflections on eco-social policies while tirelessly providing feedback on the content of this paper.

Summary

Despite the global consensus on the importance of shifting to a model of sustainable development, identifying pathways that can simultaneously and equally fulfil social, economic and environmental goals remains extremely arduous. This paper analyses opportunities for and barriers to the effective adoption of eco-social policies in national programmes by undertaking a comparative analysis of three case studies: Payment for Ecosystem Services in Costa Rica, the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputin (ITT) proposal for Yasuní National Park in Ecuador and the Virunga Alliance in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The three programmes had varying degrees of success. The Payment for Ecosystem Services was a successful national programme that led to unprecedented forest recovery in Costa Rica. On the contrary, the ITT proposal for the Yasuní National Park was a governmental policy initiative that failed due to various national and international issues. The promising Virunga Alliance, a development project implemented in Virunga Park is at risk due to regional insecurity and a fragile national economy.

The author looks at the different approaches taken in each country, analysing the benefits and trade-offs as well as the factors that led to their adoption or defeat. She then examines how the actors involved, the economic agenda, the national and international contexts, and the national policy framework influenced the success or failure of eco-social policies. Drawing from this, she identifies topics for future research on the topic.

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Introduction

Climate change, financial crises, rising inequalities both between and within countries, and increased conflicts and disasters present unprecedented challenges to humankind and call for global intervention (UNRISD 2010). Various international organizations have hosted key discussions in the last decades, aimed at identifying effective strategies to move toward more inclusive and equitable global development (UNRISD 2012a). Notably, the need of a shift toward a “people-centred and planet-sensitive” development model (Bali Communiqué of the High-Level Panel 2013:2) is stressed in various UN documents released ahead of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals¹ as well as in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development itself. Despite the global consensus on the importance of shifting to a model of sustainable development, identifying pathways that can simultaneously and equally fulfil social, economic and environmental goals remains extremely arduous. Significant progress has not yet been achieved.

This paper is part of exploratory research that looks at the potential of eco-social policies to contribute to a more balanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Eco-social policies are understood as public policies that simultaneously pursue environmental and social goals. More specifically, the paper analyses key barriers for the integration of such policies in national plans.

After briefly tracing the evolution of the concept of sustainable development to its central place in current international development debates, the paper will elaborate on what is understood by eco-social policies. It will then conduct a comparative analysis of three selected case studies to illustrate how eco-social policies have been developed, their benefits and main challenges faced. This comparison will help identify some areas for future research.

In Search of Sustainability

Sustainability currently seems to be the most popular term within the international community. With climate change as one of the most pressing manifestations of unsustainable development and the increasing pressure from civil society, the recently adopted 2030 Agenda takes a comprehensive approach in pursuing economic, social and environmental goals.

However, the term sustainable development has been around for much longer. First used in 1980 in the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN 1980), it was popularized by the “Brundtland report” of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 (WCED 1987). On that occasion, sustainable development was defined as meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (WCED 1987:43). According to the report, it “is impossible to separate economic development issues from environmental issues” (1987:12): many forms of development erode the natural resources upon which they are based, and environmental degradation can undermine economic growth. In addition, it states that poverty is both a major cause and a major effect of global environmental problems, thus highlighting the interdependence of environmental integrity and social well-being. Finally, it argues that poverty must be addressed if we are to live in a more

¹ For instance: Zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2015); *The Future We Want* (2012); *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing* (2012), *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet* (2014).

sustainable world—for only in a planet free of poverty will ecological and other catastrophes come to an end (WCED 1987).

The WCED approach spearheaded debates in highlighting the complex interrelations between environmental integrity, economic growth and social well-being, and called for a reconsideration of the mainstream approach to development. Nevertheless, there are several shortcomings in the way in which it framed the linkages between poverty eradication and environmental degradation. While poverty reduction is undoubtedly crucial and necessary to improve human development and social sustainability, there is no evidence that economic growth per se will improve environmental outcomes, nor that it will reduce inequality and lead to sustained improvements in social well-being (UNRISD 2010). On the contrary, progress in poverty reduction based on the carbon economic growth has direct environmental consequences.²

Although the original definition of the Brundtland Commission did not distinguish clearly between the three pillars of sustainable development, sustainable development was perceived as encompassing the environmental, social and economic spheres. Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, this three-tiered description has been at the basis of most definitions of sustainable development and has provided the foundation for the efforts to integrate sustainability criteria across these dimensions. This integration is aimed for by the UN, as well as many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the business sector.

More recently, greening the economy has emerged as the predominant concept for transforming the global economy toward sustainability (UNRISD 2012b). The approach emerged as a response to the 2008 triple crises of food, finance and fuel, and spread quickly across the globe as a means of combining environmental protection and economic growth. In spite of its valuable outcomes on these two fronts, green economy failed to realize its potential as it failed to address the social component (Cook et al. 2012). As foreseen by many scholars (see Lehtonen 2004; Lélé 1991), the economic dimension has driven most efforts and channelled more investments and attention, whereas environmental integrity and social well-being have often been subordinated or neglected.

Achieving a balanced emphasis between the three dimensions of sustainable development is challenged by the fact that they “are not qualitatively equal, but occupy different positions in a hierarchy” (Lehtonen 2004:201). In order to achieve a more balanced approach to sustainable development, “a more ambitious development agenda needs to shift the normative hierarchy for decision-making, away from social and environmental issues as the consequences of economic policy choices, to economic choices being conditioned on sustainable and ecological outcomes” (Cook and Dugarova 2014:32). In other words, social and environmental goals need to be considered more dominantly in decision making and set boundaries for economic choices.

Despite the various tensions and trade-offs between the three dimensions and the limited number of approaches that aim at a more balanced and integrated approach, some eco-social policies and practices have emerged. This paper compares three cases in which a

² The exploitation on non-renewable mineral resources has allowed steady and rapid economic growth since the industrial revolution, but is intrinsically incompatible with long-term development as it degrades the natural resources on which growth itself is based (Steppacher and van Griethuysen 2008). Douthwaite (1992:286) similarly finds: “since growth itself is not sustainable, the concept [of sustainable development] is a dangerous contradiction in terms”.

shift in national policies was pursued. It is based on the assumption that eco-social policies could present a way to strengthen environmental and social goals in public policy for sustainable development.

The Eco-Social Approach: Attempts to Simultaneously Mobilize Ecological and Social Aspects

An eco-social approach is understood here as an approach that simultaneously addresses social and environmental goals and brings about benefits in both dimensions. Such an approach entails two distinct streams that explicitly pursue environmental and social goals in form of (i) eco-social practices, that is, initiatives, projects or programmes promoted by civil society, community-based organizations, NGOs or other civil groups; or (ii) eco-social policies, that is public policies implemented at the municipality, national or international level. While eco-social policies serve as instruments to encourage and support eco-social practices, the latter depend on a conducive policy environment. The working definitions used here are broad and general, both because the field of eco-social policy is still in its infancy and because this paper looks at the broad spectrum of the eco-social approach.

The decision to go beyond national policies and look at eco-social practices has been motivated by the *théorème de la localité*, formulated by Camagni, Capello and Nijkamp (Theys 2002). According to this theorem, it is at a local level that the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development is more likely to happen and be effective, as it is easier to assign responsibilities and have people committing, participating and dialoguing. This seemed to be the case for the eco-social approach as well: a preliminary mapping revealed that there are far more eco-social grassroots interventions than national endeavours in place. The paper therefore contributes to the framing of future research examining the interconnections between these two levels and looking at key barriers to the integration of eco-social policies in national plans.

The interest in the potential of eco-social policies is fostered by the recognition that “social policies can influence profound transformation across economic, environmental and social domains” (Cook and Dugarova 2014:34). Social policies, understood as “interventions by governments that affect the welfare of individuals and communities” (UNRISD 2014:2), can play a significant role in encouraging sustainable development and in contributing to both economic growth and social welfare (UNRISD 2010). Furthermore, they become key in times of climate change, as “climatic variability...pose[s] grave danger to the overall well-being of an ever increasing global human population and hence impinges upon the social policy issues confronting all nation states as well as the global dimension of managing social policy responses” (Sadeque 2010:3). Climate change is not only an environmental problem, but also one of human development, social justice, equity and human rights (Hopwood et al. 2005), which demands appropriate responses from a variety of angles. Consequently, social policies today need to address environmental degradation, which often impacts primarily poor and marginalized groups that directly depend on natural resources for their livelihoods (UNDP 2012). Social policies further need to address and reduce shocks from disasters (or food shortages and socio-political unrests that may result from disasters) as they risk reversing development progress made so far (Bansha Dulal 2013).

Furthermore, eco-social policies might be beneficial for sustainable development because they embody a transdisciplinary approach³ and pay equal attention to both the environmental and social domains. To date, the social pillar has been “the weakest pillar of sustainable development” (Lehtonen 2004:199). The lack of attention paid by many policy approaches to the needs of poor and disadvantaged people was highlighted by different studies, emphasizing how environmental policies have often disproportionately impacted poorer population (Gough 2011). Eco-social policies might therefore be an effective way to overcome conflicts and tensions between social and environmental policies (Gough 2013).

Moreover, environmental and climate policies have so far focused mainly on emergency functions, social protection and climate change adaptation (UNRISD 2012a; Krause forthcoming).⁴ Social policies that are relevant to a green transition “often focus on just two of the multiple roles of social policy, namely social protection and production” (Cook et al 2012:12), thus responding to the symptoms of the climate problem, rather than to its causes. Eco-social policies could instead be transformative if they address underlying structural inequalities by incorporating two essential roles—social reproduction and redistribution—and if they are not limited to assisting those at the margins, but rather promote changes by focusing on human capital formation (UNRISD 2014). By promoting new patterns of production, consumption and investment, eco-social policies could encourage behavioural change, which is required for successful climate change response. This would impact the practices of people and companies (UNRISD 2012b) and reduce emissions and other environmental impacts (O’Brien 2008). If eco-social policies are environmentally sound and address the structural determinants of poverty and inequality, they might become part of an integrated solution, instead of being limited to a secondary role of buffering the impacts the economy has on the environment and society.

Starting from the assumption that eco-social policies have this potential, this paper aims to investigate how to best make use of them. It critically analyses three case studies of eco-social policies or practices in Costa Rica, Ecuador, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and identifies their respective benefits and trade-offs. It aims to identify the criteria that have led to their success, failure or instability. The cases were selected based on their diverse scales and level of success and impact, so that a comparison is likely to offer broad insights. The Costa Rican approach to sustainable development encompasses a national, state-driven policy framework which has led to significant progress toward sustainability. The Ecuadorian eco-social policy discussed here is an innovative but failed proposal that emerged from civil society and was moved to the hands of the state. The Virunga Alliance is a development project with an eco-social objective implemented by an NGO in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The initiative is threatened by the difficult political and economic situation. While the first two cases deal directly with government-led public policy, the third case has been selected to assess the influence of the surrounding context on eco-social initiatives, and the potential of policy uptake and scaling-up of eco-social practices. The comparative analysis will focus mainly on the influence of the wider international context on the policies’ successful implementation, the national approach to eco-social development and the respective policy and legal frameworks. In addition, it will look at various actors’ contribution and financial aspects that have impacted policy implementation.

³ A transdisciplinary approach implies the collaboration between researchers and other stakeholders across different disciplines.

⁴ Such as crop insurance mechanisms, food for work or food for cash programmes. These approaches follow a neoliberal agenda and “trickle-down” logic, putting economic growth before lowering inequalities and cleaning up the environmental damage created along the way.

Costa Rica's Success Story: When National Policies Benefit from the International Climate Policy Regime

At the forefront of international initiatives related to environmental protection, Costa Rica has been a pioneer of incorporating sustainable development into decision making at the national level. It has brought about considerable improvements in all three dimensions of sustainable development. This unique win-win scenario has been achieved through a holistic approach to sustainable development and the inclusion of an eco-social rationale within the national development plan since the 1970s. Moreover, the Costa Rican case benefited from developments in the international policy environment.

Since 1948, a government-led economic development model had brought about impressive economic growth and significant improvements in social well-being. In the 1970s, with the collapse of the Central American Common Market, the country adopted a series of neoliberal policies and austerity measures in order to tackle rising unemployment rates and increasing foreign debt (Wilson 1994).

These policies led to increasing and rapid deforestation for agricultural development: “[b]etween 1973 and 1989, deforestation rates in Costa Rica were among the highest in the world, with an average of 32,000 hectares of forest cut down each year” (Brown and Bird 2011:3). Before the Latin American economic crisis,

Costa Rica's agricultural policies focused on guaranteed prices, high subsidies and preferential interest rates. These incentives encouraged citizens to expand production to forested areas. When the crisis hit, Costa Rica had to change this approach as a result of the conditionality of several structural adjustment loans, which forced the country to eliminate subsidies, favourable interest rates and price guarantees in agriculture (Brown and Bird 2011:4).

The implications of the adjustments and simultaneous decrease in global meat demand led to a general restructuring of employment sectors, which consequently contributed to reducing deforestation rates (Brown and Bird 2011).

In addition, the country adopted a range of environmental reforms. In 1986, a law regulating forest resource use on public and private lands was enacted. In 1988, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mines was created in order to strengthen national forest policies and raise environmental concerns to the cabinet level. Furthermore, a National System of Conservation Areas was introduced. These first steps toward environmental progress benefited from a 1984 loan for natural resource conservation from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In 1989, the country's foreign debt was renegotiated and reinvested into conservation through debt-for-nature swaps.⁵

Today, over 90 per cent of the country's electricity is produced through renewable means, and Costa Rica has committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2021, which is reflected in the national climate change strategy.⁶ The strategy comprises six strategic

⁵ Debt-for-nature swaps emerged in the 1980s to address both debt and environmental degradation in developing countries. These swaps entail an agreement between a donor agency that purchases foreign debt (at a discounted price) while the respective government invests the same amount in conservation programmes, thereby keeping the money in the country instead of paying back the loan (Kilbane Gockel and Grey 2011).

⁶ In the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) in September 2015, Costa Rica has communicated greenhouse gas emission reductions that would reach zero net emissions by 2085, rather than 2021.

areas (mitigation, adaptation, measuring, capacity building, awareness raising and funding public education), aiming to align policies to climate change response as part of a long-term sustainable development strategy.⁷

Description of the approach

One of the key factors that has contributed to Costa Rica's success in environmental protection is the integration of a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) scheme, or Pago por Servicios Ambientales (PSA), into the national development plan.

Under the PES scheme, landowners are compensated for activities identified as contributing to ecosystem services and a sustainable environment, such as reforestation, sustainable forest management, forest conservation and regeneration activities. Through Law 7575, proclaimed in 1996, Costa Rica became the first country to establish a national PES scheme and to sell carbon credits internationally. The law puts landowners under contract to manage or protect their forests for a range of five to 20 years, during which they are obliged to follow a management plan that applies to all future owners of the land. Carbon offsets and watershed protection certificates are then sold via the government to domestic and international buyers in order to compensate landowners. In addition, Law 7575 ultimately banned deforestation and established the Fondo de Financiamiento Forestal de Costa Rica (FONAFIFO), the Costa Rican Forestry Finance Fund, which was mandated to coordinate the financial resources of the forest sector. The adoption of Law 7575 marked the beginning of a broader and more systematized commitment to sustainable development.

Benefits and trade-offs of the approach

The PES scheme “has been associated with significant benefits at local, national and global levels, including in relation to water quality protection, carbon fixation, biodiversity conservation, health, and infrastructure improvement and poverty reduction” (Brown and Bird 2011:8).

The most outstanding outcome of the PES is notably the recreation and protection of Costa Rica's natural resources: the country managed to increase its forest cover from 17 per cent in 1983 to 52 per cent in 2011 (Brown and Bird 2011). To date, nearly 30 per cent of the country's land area lies within National Protected Areas, starting from nearly zero in the 1960s (Brown and Bird 2011).⁸

Furthermore, the PES programme is widely regarded as an indirect engine for economic growth. The conservation of natural resources has strengthened Costa Rica's tourism sector, one of the fastest growing sectors of the country, which by 1995 became the largest foreign exchange earner. The tourism boom began in 1987 and by 1995, international tourism earned USD 681 million. The sector grew to USD 1.57 billion within a decade (UNWTO 2008). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), growth in the Costa Rica tourism sector consistently exceeds the global average. In 2012, tourism contributed with 12.5 per cent to the country's GDP (WEF 2013). The sector is increasing at such a rapid pace that several civil society organizations have appealed to the government to maintain an eco-tourism frame,⁹ arguing that if eco-tourism became mass tourism, it would have significant environmental impacts, putting at risk the very factors that led to the expansion of the

⁷ <http://climateactiontracker.org/countries/costarica.html>, accessed in July 2015.

⁸ This is well above the developing world average of 13 per cent and developed world average of 8 per cent (Brown and Bird 2011).

⁹ <http://archive.earth.org/blog/is-it-time-to-rethink-the-costa-rican-tourism-industry>, accessed in August 2015.

sector. Increasing air traffic would also contribute to climate change and impact the biosphere.

The PES programme has directly contributed to the creation of 18,000 jobs and indirectly supported an additional 30,000 (Blasiak 2011). In its first five years, payments were made to over 4,400 individuals (Porrás and Neves 2006). As of 2011, USD 230 million had been paid out to various entities, such as rural and indigenous communities and individuals (Blasiak 2011).

On the other hand, social aspects have been slightly disregarded in the implementation of the PES scheme, especially in its early phase, as the programme was “not designed with a poverty-alleviation angle” (Porrás and Neves 2006:9). In Costa Rica, the number of individuals interested in participating in the PES programme greatly exceeds available funds, and many are left behind.¹⁰ Criteria for prioritization are set annually by decree and vary by activity (for example, reforestation or conservation) (Porrás and Neves 2006), but include importance for hydrological processes, significance of species habitat, proximity to existing protected areas and carbon sequestration potential (Karousakis 2007). In the beginning, landowners applied for the programme on a first-come-first-served basis, and no attention was paid to the inclusion and participation of low-income farmers, who were further marginalized due to transaction costs. In 2004, the PES scheme “went through a series of changes to lower barriers to participation for poorer farmers with smaller landholdings” (Brown and Bird 2011:8). On that occasion, the management system was improved: the authority to allocate contracts was handed to FONAFIFO, which created eight regional offices to maximize the efficiency of the contracting process (originally, a separate government institution as well as NGOs contracted landowners to participate in the PES programme). Moreover, preference is now given to applicants from regions with a low Social Development Index (SDI). Although these steps did increase poor farmers’ participation and proves that FONAFIFO is moving in the right direction, Costa Rica cannot yet claim to have had a genuine social impact (Porrás 2010). Although some small and potentially vulnerable landowners have benefited from priority access, most of the beneficiaries of the social priority criteria of an SDI below 40 are still relatively large landowners (Porrás et al. 2013).

Having recognized the insufficiency of the government’s intervention to fully meet the needs of the most disadvantaged, additional initiatives have also been launched by NGOs and civil society. The complementary payment scheme PSA Solidario was created by the NGO Fundecor:

PSA Solidario is an instrument of Costa Rica’s voluntary carbon market that was created as part of the strategy to become carbon neutral. Through the PSA Solidario, small-scale farmers who protect forests can earn carbon credits that they sell to national industries so as to offset their greenhouse gas emissions. Although the payments from PSA Solidario are 20 per cent lower than in the national scheme, transactions are faster (Porrás 2012a).

In PSA Solidario, farmers face less competition to participate, as the demand is lower compared to the national PES scheme. The overall price per ton of CO₂ remains around USD 6 and profits go almost entirely to the landowner, as Fundecor—unlike FONAFIFO—does not hire facilitators to ease the transactions.

¹⁰ For instance, debtors to the National Health System or farmers whose land size is less than a hectare cannot participate in the program.

Although the social impacts of the programme can be further improved, the reforestation achieved and consequent tourism industry have contributed to alleviating poverty (Andam et al. 2010; Robalino and Villalobos 2015) through job creation and increased revenue, especially in the areas located in proximity to the parks' entrances.¹¹

Nevertheless, some challenges and trade-offs remain. The PES payments can, for example, hardly compete with the income farmers could make from leasing their land or cultivating lucrative crops such as pineapple. In addition, although the biggest share of the payments for ecosystem services stems from national revenues, a remainder is provided by the international donor community and through voluntary contributions of businesses and hydroelectric facilities (Pérez 2006). The scheme therefore depends on money that emerges from the international climate regime, which threatens financial sustainability. However, the Costa Rican case is hitherto among the most promising national endeavours toward sustainable development and the country has been coined a role model for its comprehensive approach that considers social, environmental and economic aspects.

Factors for success

The achievements of Costa Rica have been encouraged by several factors. At a very early stage, the abolishment of Costa Rica's army under the 1948 Constitution increased the share of public funding available for universal health and education, thus making social policies a focus of the government (Brown and Bird 2011). This led Costa Rica onto a novel path—unique in Latin America—moving to a progressive and advanced social state and democratic stability (Filgueira 2005). The focus on education fostered the flourishing of the country's large scientific and research community, that “has played an important role in ensuring that environmental considerations are integrated in national development policies” (Rodriguez and Camacho 2002:69). According to Brown and Bird (2011), the high investment in education has also helped the political classes to focus attention on environmental issues. In addition, the country's political stability and relatively high education levels have set a sound basis for its development. Costa Rica has a stable and strong democratic system where corruption levels are low and political participation is high (Brown and Bird 2011). Development outcomes in terms of income distribution, education, literacy and quality of life are comparable with many industrialized nations. Since the 1980s, the Partido Liberación Nacional has implemented a neoliberal agenda (Wilson 1994). Neoliberal policies, along with the country's stability, attracted foreign investments and international financial support as the country focused on outward-oriented and export-led growth, opening up to foreign investment and gradually liberalizing trade,¹² which was helpful to launch the PES scheme.

Second, the PES scheme was institutionalized and integrated into national policy, moving beyond the project approach. This encouraged the sincere commitment of all national actors and the coordination among various ministries, which “have allowed the country to develop new and innovative forest policies, setting it apart from other developing tropical forested nations, where the forest sector is often characterized as an arena of conflict between different stakeholders” (Brown and Bird 2011:5). Similarly,

¹¹ A study by Ferraro, Hanauer and Sims (2011) demonstrates that poverty reduction near protected areas is more likely to occur when conservation areas are “placed on lands with little agricultural value that, by their proximity to major markets, can benefit from tourism and associated infrastructure development (thus, offsetting any losses from foregone agriculture and forest resource exploitation)”.

¹² <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/costarica/overview>, accessed September 2015.

institutional and legal reforms led to complementarity and coherence between legislation, institutions and economic policy (Brown and Bird 2011).¹³

Furthermore, the Costa Rican PES scheme was built on an already existing system of payments for reforestation and forest management: in the 1970s, tax-based incentives for timber plantations were introduced for the first time. In 1986, they were broadened by Law 7032, which created Forest Certificates as monetary incentives for reforestation activities of various kind. This is likely to have increased the potential for success of the PES scheme by developing the appropriate national capacity.

Moreover, the government established an internal semi-funded system from the inception of the PES scheme, collecting parts of the necessary revenues with a 3.5 per cent tax on fossil fuel sales. This reduced the country's dependence on external aid. Additional funds were generated through water taxes, revenues from a forestry tax, a loan from the Global Environment Fund (GEF) and grants from the German and Norwegian governments and the World Bank. Furthermore, the fund has been fed by financial contributions from the state through ordinary and extraordinary budgets, and donations or credits received from national and international organizations and agencies within the carbon market. More recently, FONAFIFO has developed agreements with local private businesses to generate alternative financial resources for the PES programme. Other ways to provide FONAFIFO with non-governmental long-term funding have also emerged, such as the Green Bank Card. This debit card accumulates points when it is used and which the bank then donates to a biodiversity fund for forest conservation (Porrás 2012b).

The participation and sincere commitment of the population has also been crucial in ensuring that the policies are properly implemented and supported by the local population's actions. The national approach to sustainable development identifies an explicit role for civil society actors to cooperate with the government in biodiversity conservation (Rodríguez and Camacho 2002). This was beneficial as it fostered stewardship of the locals, promoting their leadership and ownership. In addition, Costa Rica has successfully balanced regulation and incentives (Brown and Bird 2011). According to Brown and Bird (2011:5), establishing fiscal incentives for conservation has led to "an important change in perception among forest owners as to the value of the forests, and also the benefits that can accrue from the provision of environmental services". Such change hints at the transformative potential of eco-social policies: while local people previously were not accustomed to protecting the environment, the integrated approach made them its main custodians.

Finally, Costa Rica benefited from "well-established property rights: the proportion of the population in rural areas without secure land tenure is relatively low and much of the forested area is under well-documented private ownership. This is an important distinction between Costa Rica and many other forest-rich developing countries" (Brown and Bird 2011:4), which makes implementing a PES scheme easier and hinders the tragedy of the commons. In addition, the successful reforestation rested on good ecological conditions. The soils were still rich when the PES scheme started, owing to the late industrialization of the country. Similarly, the country's small size, together

¹³ According to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD 2014:6), "policy coherence is not simply about better coordination in the design and implementation of interventions across different fields. It means ensuring that progress in one domain is not undermined by consequences or reactions in another; that the sharing of costs and benefits is perceived as equitable—between groups, countries or regions; that pro-growth policies and technological or efficiency gains do not crowd out welfare and sustainability objectives; and that environmental protection goals are balanced with human welfare considerations".

with low oil reserves, facilitated the ban on oil extraction, building instead on revenue from tourism.

Costa Rica's decision to move toward more environmentally sensitive growth has greatly benefited from the international climate regime and the institutional modality that developed with it. As greenhouse gas emissions kept rising, the international climate regime started to establish an international CO₂ market that would allow polluters to offset their emissions by investing in carbon sinks.¹⁴ Since Costa Rica found itself under economic pressure exactly when the carbon market was gaining space, it made use of a window of opportunity and designed its national strategy to comply with the new international approach.

Owing to all these specificities, Costa Rica became a leader in sustainable development as “socio-political culture, democratic tradition and strong civil society have encouraged the state to play an important role in safeguarding the nation's biodiversity” (Rodriguez and Camacho 2002:69). According to UNEP, through this successful performance, the Costa Rican case suggests that “a country can implement environmentally stringent policies, while simultaneously: (i) sustainably manage and recover forests, (ii) achieving economic growth, and (ii) receiving recognition as a leader in sustainable development”.¹⁵ Costa Rica demonstrated the feasibility of a new model, in which wealth creation is based on protecting natural capital and making it productive in the long term, rather than by exploiting it. Therefore, this case suggests that countries can achieve a more sustainable form of economic development if the right measures are adopted within a supportive context.

Yasuní-ITT in Ecuador: Turning a National Resource into an International Good?

Ecuador is among the 17 countries in the world that were identified as megadiverse, that is countries with highest levels of biodiversity and at least 5,000 endemic plants.¹⁶ The country's economy has traditionally relied on exporting primary products. Cocoa beans and banana have been major exports between 1900 and 1970, while oil has been the most exported commodity since 1972. Other important exports are shrimps and flowers. “Ecuador is substantially dependent on its petroleum resources, which have accounted for more than half of the country's export earnings and approximately 25% of public sector revenues in recent years.”¹⁷ For many years, Ecuador's economy has grown without any sustainability consideration. As noted by Fleury et al. (2008:18):

the expansion of the agricultural frontier into high biodiversity areas, extensive banana cultivation, and the growth of the oil sector as the driving economic force since the 1970s have all had significant environmental impact. The oil boom has promoted unplanned migrations to Amazon lowland areas, soil and water contamination, deforestation and heightened social conflict between settlers and indigenous communities.

Similar to presidents of other Latin American countries (such as Bolivia, Brazil, Peru and Venezuela) that have come to power with promises of an alternative political agenda and post-neoliberal development order (Pellegrini et al. 2014), President Rafael

¹⁴ This approach allows countries with higher financial resources to buy offsets for their detrimental climate impacts rather than forcing them to reduce domestic emissions.

¹⁵ http://www.unep.org/forests/Portals/142/docs/Costa_Rica.pdf, accessed in August 2015.

¹⁶ <http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/content/megadiverse-countries>, accessed 25 May 2016.

¹⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ec.html>, accessed in August 2015.

Correa has underscored the double priority of eradicating poverty and developing a diversified and sustainable economy. As a consequence, investments in the public sector, the social sector and transportation have increased. Recent data from the World Bank illustrate that economic growth has been inclusive, that poverty and inequality levels have been reduced (although they still remain high) and that the middle class has grown. Despite these remarkable outcomes, the achievements in poverty reduction and inequality are undermined by a narrow economic base that relies heavily on the oil sector.¹⁸

Description of the approach

In line with the commitment to find more sustainable development pathways and to modify the mineral resource-based economy, the ambitious Yasuní-ITT Initiative was presented at the 62nd UN General Assembly in New York. President Correa pledged to keep oil underground on the condition that he would receive a USD 3.6 billion compensation from the international community, which equalled approximately half the estimated value of exploiting the resource. Correa stressed the need for a global partnership for global interests:

For the first time, an oil producer country, Ecuador, where a third of the resources of the State depends on the exploitation of the above mentioned resources, resigns this income for the well-being of the whole humanity and invites the world to join efforts through fair compensation, in order that together we lay the foundations for a *more human and fair civilization*.¹⁹

The fiscal compensation was to be gathered over 13 years to implement the initiative in the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputin (ITT) area of Yasuní National Park, which contains roughly 20 per cent of the country's proven oil reserves.²⁰ Yasuní National Park, as one of the areas with the highest biodiversity on earth, was designated as biosphere reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1989.

The proposal of leaving oil in the ground to avoid carbon emissions, safeguard indigenous rights and conserve biodiversity emerged from a joint process that involved several actors, in particular civil society organizations such as Oilwatch, Acción Ecológica and Pachamama. The activists "linked Ecuador's persistent problems of poverty, environmental degradation and underdevelopment to the country's dependence on oil extraction" (Pellegrini et al. 2014:4). A first proposal to refrain from oil exploration in the entire Ecuadorian Amazonas was developed by Oilwatch in 2005. The following year, a similar plan was included in Correa's electoral campaign. Following his victory, Alberto Acosta, one of the initiators of the original proposal, became the Minister of Mines and Energy, and the initiative was moved from a civil society request to being in the hands of the state. At that point, it was also limited to the ITT blocks of the Ecuadorian Amazonas (Pellegrini et al. 2014).

In 2010, the Multi-Donor Trust Fund Yasuní-ITT was launched under the administration of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to collect donations. Resources gathered in the fund could have been used "to facilitate the implementation of projects in Ecuador dealing with biodiversity conservation, renewable energy sources and social development" (Pellegrini et al. 2014:2).

¹⁸ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ecuador/overview>, accessed in August 2015.

¹⁹ <http://www.un.org/webcast/climatechange/highlevel/2007/pdfs/ecuador-eng.pdf>, accessed in May 2016.

²⁰ http://www.sosYasuni.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=177&catid=1&Itemid=34, accessed in August 2015.

In 2012, the fund had received USD 200 million, partially from governments, but mostly from individuals. At that time, the government announced the desire to move forward with the project. In 2013, however, a commission created by Correa to evaluate the economic progress against the final goal concluded that economic results were insufficient. Correa then dropped the plan in August 2013. Subsequently, permits for drilling have been signed in May 2014 and oil production is planned to begin in 2016, while construction of access roads and camps and initial drilling have already started.²¹

Benefits and trade-offs of the approach

The ITT proposal was extremely innovative in implying that oil is more precious when kept in the ground than when exploited. Such an assumption might be true if one goes beyond the market value and private benefits of oil alone and considers the environmental and social costs of oil extraction and use. Oil exploration in the ITT would lead to deforestation, loss of flora and fauna biodiversity, loss of ecosystem services, water pollution, solid waste and CO₂ emissions. From a social perspective, this would also mean loss of livelihood for local inhabitants and indigenous people. The exploration of the ITT blocks would go against the will of indigenous populations and threaten the livelihoods of some of the last populations living in voluntary isolation, such as the Tagaeri and the Taromenane. These two groups have fought throughout the twentieth century to keep their land undisturbed, shaping the discourse of indigenous rights and land sovereignty for indigenous people. While oil would certainly bring higher fiscal revenues than direct economic costs of social and environmental losses, it would cause substantial losses in terms of social well-being and long-term sustainable development.

Instead of focusing on the short-term income from oil exploitation, the ITT initiative would have meant an investment in the long-term gains originating from environmental conservation. The country would have moved from a mineral-minded approach to a biotic-minded approach (Steppacher and van Griethuysen 2008).

Factors for failure

This “pragmatic, yet idealistic proposal”²² emerged within the context of international negotiations on climate change. Vogel (2010) points out that Ecuador used the ITT initiative to stress the need for compensating countries that produce positive externalities and charging those who produce negative ones. The key assumption was that Ecuador is providing the world with a global public good by refraining from extracting petroleum for which it should be remunerated. Correa justified his claim for remuneration claiming: “What we asked was not charity, it was responsibility in the fight against climate change”.²³ Nevertheless, the success of the initiative was hampered by the absence of a compatible climate regime. The ITT initiative tried to reverse the private interest rationale by giving value to social and environmental benefits. Unlike Costa Rica, the Ecuadorian government claimed to be giving up its own economic interests in exchange for the social benefits of the people living in the Amazon and the protection of the environment. The proposal sought compensation for these benefits outside of a market-exchange logic as it did not offer its supporters private gains (which is the case in carbon-offsetting schemes, for example). Although this approach stemmed from the paradigm of “selling nature to save it” (McAfee 1999)—in which

²¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/16/ecuador-approves-Yasuni-amazon-oil-drilling>, accessed in August 2015.

²² <http://thebrokeronline.eu/Articles/The-demise-of-the-Yasuni-ITT-initiative>, accessed in August 2015.

²³ <http://ens-newswire.com/2013/08/16/ecuador-allows-oil-drilling-in-Yasuni-national-park/>, accessed in August 2015.

neoliberalism dominates environmental policy (Arsel and Buscher 2012)—the state was coming to act as a guarantor of conservation and not as enabler of market mechanisms.

The Ecuadorian proposal, which could have been a promising “pilot project” (Vogel 2010), was probably too ambitious in its attempt to involve global actors and the international public in its national decision making and efforts, given the lack of a supportive international climate governance regime. Vogel (2010) pinpoints the various challenges embedded in the initiative asking: “Why should the international community pay anyone for essentially doing nothing? What should they pay? And how?”

First, bringing other countries to contribute to a fund of a strong national nature is extremely challenging. National plans are seen as closed systems rather than cumulative actions that lead to the stability of the biosphere as a globally relevant entity. The global nature of climate change clashes with the national ownership of fossil resources. It also highlights the lack of an effective global governance structure able to enforce global actions and sanction violations.

Second, Ecuador asked for a significant amount, the estimates for which were difficult to rely on as the price of oil is impacted by speculations over short periods of time (Vogel 2010). Considering this in combination with the lack of guarantees that the pledge would be kept by future governments and their national plans, the likelihood of foreign governments contributing to this fund was very low. International donors prefer market mechanisms such as REDD²⁴ (Rival 2012), with which corporations can offset their carbon emissions by rewarding forest conservation in developing countries. Instead of the pledge for unconditional funds, Ecuador could have developed something easier to buy into, such as a leasing scheme in which countries could have paid off the value of the untouched forest over time or its protection would fall back to the original owner, who could then freely decide how to use it.

Furthermore, the ITT case shows the negative impact of a lack of governance and trust in national governments. During the past 20 years, Ecuador faced periods of political instability and frequent changes of government, which affected its performance and coordination. As a result, the country lacks “a consistent environmental policy framework and policy implementation has been limited” (Fleury et al 2008:18). For instance, Law 37 decentralized environmental management despite the fact that “many local governments lack the abilities and tools to assume this function” (Fleury et al 2008:18). In addition, the lack of strong democratic structures in the country reduced the likelihood of financial support from international actors.

The case also points to the ease with which the normative framework can be modified and redressed toward an intended goal. By dropping the plan, Correa invoked an exception in the country’s Constitution. Adopted in 2008, Ecuador’s Constitution defines nature as a rights-holding entity (Arsel 2012), and is built around the concept of *sumk kawsay* (living well). *Sumk kawsay* is a Kichwa expression embedded in the ethical values of indigenous cultures, which denotes a way of living in harmony with communities, ourselves and nature (Gudynas 2011). Article 14 of the Constitution stresses “the right of people to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment that ensure sustainability and good living”. According to the Constitution, oil exploitation in national parks is only permitted under special conditions. Article 407

²⁴ Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) mechanisms are an effort to create a financial value for the carbon stored in forests, offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development.

“requires that when it comes to exploiting non-renewable resources in a protected area, the President of the Republic must request permission from the National Assembly, which has to declare extraction as being in the national interest and may call a referendum” (Pellegrini et al. 2014:2). When Correa dropped the plan and called for an exception in the Constitution, he argued that extracting oil was the only way to overcome poverty in the country.²⁵ He blamed the world’s richest countries for expecting developing countries such as Ecuador, which produces less than 1 per cent of the global CO₂ emissions, to renounce its economic progress for the global environment. Based on another law requiring a referendum to take place in case 5 per cent of the electoral roll (about 584,000 individuals) demand it, the Ecuadorian non-for-profit Yasunidos launched a campaign and collected 750,000 signatures in favour of the referendum. Many international mobilizations also started simultaneously.²⁶ In the meantime, Correa launched a publicity campaign attempting to convince Ecuadoreans of the benefits of oil extraction, and he promised that he would use the revenue to invest in Ecuador’s poorest areas, including Yasuní Park. At the same time, another organization backing Correa’s claims launched a referendum to collect signatures in favour of oil exploitation. In the end, the Yasunidos reached the necessary quorum but the government rejected most of the signatures, claiming their invalidity. This suggests that the government ignored civil society’s concerns for the sake of national economic growth.

The ITT case also shows that too strong a focus on the international community can distract from national-level reform needs. The lack of sincere interest on the part of the Ecuadorian government to change the status quo might explain why Correa advanced this proposal instead of focusing on ameliorating national policies. AmazonWatch has suggested that Correa’s “own contradictory policies and mismanagement of the initiative may have been its ultimate undoing”.²⁷ The fact that Correa frequently spoke of a “Plan B” drilling option to be implemented in case the initiative failed and that he undermined the attempts of the negotiating team to tailor the proposal for potential donors²⁸, did not demonstrate true commitment on his side. Moreover, during 2013 presidential election, right before the plan was abandoned, Alberto Acosta, Ecuador’s former energy minister and then presidential candidate against Correa, warned that the government’s environmental policies were going to change. He foresaw that the ITT initiative was going to be dropped should Correa win the election. He claimed that the infrastructure to exploit the oil was already in place, and that Correa was “preparing to blame rich nations for not giving enough to make the project work”.²⁹ Similarly, Correa has been accused of having put forward the ITT proposal only to show Ecuador’s incapacity to implement environmentally sustainable plans and consequently proceed with oil exploitation, as per his own interests. This emphasizes the need for transparency, accountability and good governance in order to make eco-social policies effective.

²⁵ <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/politica/rafael-correa-dice-que-ecuador.html>. Accessed in August 2015.

²⁶ Especially by NGOs as Accion Ecologica, Amazonia por la Vida and Oilwatch.

²⁷ <http://amazonwatch.org/news/2013/0816-ecuador-president-pulls-plug-on-innovative-Yasuni-itt-initiative>, accessed in September 2015.

²⁸ <http://amazonwatch.org/news/2010/0119-Yasuni-itt-chronicle-of-a-death-foretold>, accessed in August 2016

²⁹ <http://ens-newswire.com/2013/08/16/ecuador-allows-oil-drilling-in-Yasuni-national-park/>, accessed in September 2015.

Virunga National Park: Black Gold versus Environmental Protection

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has faced an unstable economic and political regime for many years, and has experienced socio-political unrests, both within the country and beyond. The unrests and resulting displacement of many people have disrupted the country's development considerably and impacted not only its society, but also the economy and national governance (UNEP 2012). Natural resources and the environment have both exacerbated these conflicts and suffered from the consequences.³⁰ According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP 2012), the interest in exploiting the country's natural resources and their consequent depletion have had severe social impacts. The DRC's diversified natural resources are crucial for the subsistence of its population as well as for regional development.

Virunga National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in the DRC, bordering Rwanda and Uganda. Established in 1925, Virunga is Africa's oldest national park and the continent's most biologically diverse protected area. The park's 7,800 square kilometers include, among others, forests, savannas, swamps, lava plains, active volcanoes and glaciated peaks, and are home to about a quarter of the world's critically endangered mountain gorillas. The park is run as a public-private partnership between the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), which is the governmental National Parks Authority, and Virunga Foundation, a UK-based charity organization. While the former has a legal mandate to enforce the conservation laws that are designed to protect the country's flora and fauna, the latter exists to support the conservation efforts and protect local communities.³¹

Since 1994, the park has been on the list of "world heritage in danger" due to an almost uninterrupted series of challenges over the past 20 years. The 1994 Rwandan genocide, for instance, displaced more than 1 million refugees who settled in the park and put pressure on the park's forests and wildlife, often resorting to poaching, logging and trafficking. Between 1998 and 2004, 160,000 more displaced people settled in Virunga. According to UNEP, the refugee flow "resulted in the loss of some 300 km² of forest. As many as 40,000 people entered the park each day to harvest forest products and hunt wild animals, including elephant, hippopotamus, and buffalo" (2006:401). In order to meet the settlers' needs while conserving the environment, various initiatives have been launched by several international organizations. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), for example, has established plantations able to provide wood while protecting the forests (UNEP 2012). Despite the achievements of these interventions, "two decades of armed conflict and intense poaching by militias have taken their toll on the park ecosystem" (Gouby 2015). In addition, 130 park rangers have been killed since 1996, and UNEP estimates that 4,500 great apes are being killed every year in the Congo basin (UNEP 2012). In 2007, the park engaged in a comprehensive reform programme involving a major initiative, the Virunga Alliance, to reduce criminal activities in the area.

Description of the approach

Virunga Alliance is a development project that aims to foster peace and prosperity through "the responsible economic development of natural resources"³² for 4 million

³⁰ Recent studies indicate that more than 40 per cent of the conflicts among countries in the last 60 years are strongly linked to environmental causes (UNEP 2012).

³¹ <https://virunga.org/who-we-are/>, accessed in September 2015.

³² <https://virunga.org/virunga-alliance/>, accessed in September 2015.

people who live within a day's walk of the park's borders. The project identified poverty and the lack of a sustainable business sector as the root causes of Virunga's problems. Poverty forces the park's inhabitants to overexploit natural resources for their daily fuel and food needs, and makes them more likely to engage in illegal actions such as poaching and logging. Similarly, it makes it unlikely that inhabitants will oppose external pressures for the unconditional use of the park's resources. The project therefore aims to tackle poverty, assuming that no solution can be effective if it does not address the living conditions of the park's inhabitants. The programme has three phases to be implemented between 2008 and 2020, and four main areas of intervention: to (i) strengthen the agro-industry, (ii) enhance tourism, (iii) create sustainable fisheries and (iv) create hydroelectric facilities able to provide energy and attract investments to the area. It is envisioned that progress in these areas will create better job opportunities. Access to social services and economic development is deemed necessary to rebuild infrastructures and ensure the conservation of the park's ecosystems while reducing criminal activities. The programme also involves the strengthening of the park's ranger force to effectively protect its wildlife and habitats.

Virunga Alliance operates with an eco-social logic as it aims to bring about improvements in all three pillars of sustainable development. Job creation will lead to responsible and sustainable economic development; clean energy provision will contribute to social development through:

- i. improved education levels (electrification is provided free of charge to schools and availability of better infrastructure will increase the time available for education);
- ii. better health services provision (because of free electrification for health facilities and increasing water availability); and
- iii. reduced deforestation (as a consequence of improved electrification).

Improved social and economic well-being will in turn reduce the exploitation of natural resources both by the locals and by external actors, who will have to face opposition from the inhabitants to have the park protected. Thanks to improvements in these areas, the tourism sector will be strengthened and bring in revenues while ensuring the long-term protection of the park's territory.

The initiative has been operational since 2008 but at severe risk from conflicts as a result of the exploitation of newly discovered oil and other natural resources located in the park. The project is jointly managed by the Virunga Foundation and ICCN. It was largely funded through private and public support, including the Howard G. Buffet Foundation and the European Union. In addition, an agreement with the Congolese government regulates that a minimum of 30 per cent of the park's revenues generated through tourism should be invested in community development projects, which "are defined by the community and based on the principle of free and informed consultation with civil society groups".³³

Benefits and trade-offs of the approach

Thanks to its holistic approach, the Virunga Alliance has been successful in all three domains of sustainable development. The project has boosted environmental conservation and protection, leading to the flourishing of the park's flora and fauna. Infrastructures are now green and carbon-free. Electricity is provided free of charge to schools and hospitals, and can also be sold to industries in nearby cities. Critical infrastructures, such as health facilities, roads, schools and hydroelectric facilities, have

³³ <https://virunga.org/virunga-alliance/>, accessed in September 2015.

been built by local communities, which provided job opportunities and improved livelihood security. Higher financial capital increases education and access to health facilities and contributes to human development. Owing to more diversified job opportunities, the local population is now less dependent on the smuggling of charcoal and ivory and less prone to resort to other illegal actions. Moreover, the project has contributed to strengthen the park's potential for tourism: the director of the National Park, Emmanuel De Merode,³⁴ reported in a TEDTalk³⁵ that the tourism sector in Virunga has registered a 100 per cent growth between 2008 and 2011.³⁶

These achievements have been facilitated by Virunga Foundation's comprehensive approach, which has included the social dimension's vital role in local environmental projects and has accordingly pursued human and social security as the precondition of environmental integrity, emphasizing the need for anchoring environmental policies in the social dimension of sustainable development.

Factors for insecurity

The Virunga Alliance's activities have been constantly undermined by violent conflicts and the unstable political situation in the region. The project was sustained throughout two civil wars, but at a considerable cost to both the park's staff and its wildlife.

At the very beginning of its operation, the Virunga Alliance was confronted with the discovery of oil in the park. In 2007, two exploration permits touching upon Virunga's boundaries have been awarded by the Congolese Ministry of Hydrocarbons to the French company Total and the British SOCO International. An additional threat emerged in 2010, when oil was discovered within Block V (an area which partially includes Virunga National Park), where exploration licenses were granted to SOCO, in spite of the fact that the exploration and exploitation of oil are incompatible with the UNESCO World Heritage Site status. To allow drilling for oil wells legally, the government would have to declassify parts of the park or Virunga as a whole. While Total reportedly agreed not to explore within the current limits of the park, SOCO carried out exploratory activities and concluded a seismic study that was submitted to the national government in July 2014 (Gouby 2015).

Many conflicts leading to deaths, damages, the closure of the park to tourism as well as economic and biodiversity losses have occurred within the park's territory since the discovery of oil there. According to the reports of park authorities, such conflicts have often been used as a strategy to force inhabitants to leave the park and switch its land to new use.³⁷ Similarly, the director of the park said that many endangered species were killed in the last decades, based on the assumption that a decreased animal population would lead to opening the area to foreign investors for oil drilling, logging and other currently illegal practices.³⁸

The British oil company tried to persuade the local population that oil exploitation could be beneficial. In 2014, Human Rights Watch published a report in which activists, rangers and community members accused SOCO of corruption, bribery and

³⁴ The DRC government decided to award the position to a Belgian, because it was concerned by the possibility of interethnic clashes that could have threatened the appropriate management of the park.

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhnGzaEOE34>, accessed in September 2015.

³⁶ According to the projections made by the Virunga Alliance, by 2020 tourism in the park will generate a revenue of USD 38 million per year. WWF (2013:38) claimed that tourism in Virunga could generate a total direct value of USD 57 million annually "in a situation where stability and securing access to the park are guaranteed".

³⁷ Orlando von Einsiedel, *Virunga*, documentary, directed by Orlando von Einsiedel and Joanna Natasegara (2014; London: Grain Media)

³⁸ <http://savevirunga.com/2015/07/19/virunga-the-most-dangerous-job-in-africa/>, accessed in October 2015.

intimidations to get hold of Virunga National Park and ensure its inhabitants' support.³⁹ Nevertheless, the inhabitants have widely opposed oil exploration, as they were aware of the detrimental impacts it would have on their livelihoods, and many civil society organizations have denounced SOCO's actions. Agriculture and fishing are the key livelihood activities in the area and highly dependent on natural resources which would be dramatically affected by oil exploitation. Conservationists have highlighted that this would "potentially lead to the pollution of Lake Albert, on which 50,000 families depend for fishing, and could further destabilise the region by exacerbating conflict between rival groups" (Vidal 2014).

Protracted conflicts and crises threaten the lives and livelihoods of Virunga's people and have major impacts on health. UNEP reports that environmental conflicts in Congo are linked to an increase in disease rates, especially among displaced populations. This is caused by lack of access to infrastructure and health facilities, worsened hygienic conditions and limited access to safe water and food, notably experienced by those living in camps. These inadequate living conditions have caused the recent resurgence of tuberculosis, trypanosomiasis and leprosy, diseases previously under control in the DRC (UNEP 2012).

In other words, while natural resource exploitation, and particularly oil exploration, would bring considerable revenues to the DRC, it would destroy local livelihoods and have significant social and environmental impacts. A development strategy built on environmental and social considerations could, in contrast, ensure a much more peaceful future in the area, according to WWF (2013).

In June 2014, following public pressure, SOCO announced it was ceasing its operation in Virunga and committed not to drill unless the DRC and UNESCO change the park's status.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, statements made by the DRC Prime Minister Augustin Matata Ponyo in March 2015 indicate that the government is considering boundary changes and the declassification of parts of the park (Gouby 2015). In addition, Uganda has recently accepted seven bids for oil exploration in the Albertine Graben,⁴¹ bordering the DRC and comprising lakes Albert and Edward that partially lie within Virunga and share its ecosystem. The park therefore remains under severe threat.⁴²

These developments are in conflict with the Congolese decree 69–041 issued in 1969, granting the park protection from any kind of oil exploration and exploitation. It also clashes with the rationale of the 2006 Congolese Constitution, by which the country vows the protection of the environment and of the national natural resources, based on the recognition "that everyone has the right to enjoy and live in a healthy environment, conducive to his or her development" and that the government has to "protect the environment and the well-being of the population" (Article 53).⁴³ The Ministry of Environment, Natural Conservation and Tourism, as well as many other government agencies in the DRC, face several challenges which limit their capacity to fulfil their mandate. Their work is constrained by the absence of clearly articulated national environmental policies, the shortage of human and financial capital, the lack of

³⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/04/dr-congo-investigate-attacks-oil-project-critics>, accessed in December 2015.

⁴⁰ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/06/140612-virunga-warden-shooting-congo-gorillas-soco-oil/>, accessed in October 2015.

⁴¹ <http://www.petroleum.go.ug/news/48/Government-of-Uganda-receives-seven-bidders-for-the-First-Licensing-Round>, accessed June 2016.

⁴² http://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?256331/Africas-oldest-national-park-now-under-new-threat#, accessed in November 2015.

⁴³ These rights are reinforced by the right to national development (Art. 58) and the right to enjoy human patrimony (Art. 59).

infrastructure and equipment, the weakness of technical capacity, and the lacunae of the legal framework (UNEP 2012). Such problems are recurrent in many developing countries, which often do not have a sound environmental policy framework or lack the capacity to enforce environmental rules and regulations. When sufficient guidelines are not in place, maintaining and protecting national parks take a back seat, especially if the country goes through severe economic and political hardships as in the DRC. As social and environmental costs of oil exploitation are not reflected in its economic revenue, oil exploitation is more profitable than and takes priority over the protection of Virunga National Park. As long as there is no supportive economic context, it is unlikely that the government will prioritize environmental and social considerations over oil revenues.

The Virunga case also points to the limited capacity of UNESCO to influence environmental protection: although Virunga's World Heritage status might discourage the modification of the national park's boundary, it is not able to directly boost its preservation. International institutions better able to enforce environmental standards and regulations are still needed.

Finally, due to the variety of actors and levels of governance involved, this case points to the interconnectivities between the local, national and international levels, and their different, often contradicting, needs and requests. While national decision-making processes are highly influenced by the international economic context, the local level does not appear to be very influential on the decisions taken at the country level: this shows that the success of eco-social practices depends on whether or not national-level policies are compatible with eco-social development.

Comparative Analysis

Having described the three cases and analysed their weaknesses and strengths separately, I will now briefly expand on the insights gained from their comparative analysis despite their diverse natures, scales and successes. The following section will compare the case studies with regard to the role played by the international context, the national approaches and policy frameworks for eco-social development, the economic interference, and the actors involved.

International context

This section focuses on the influence of the wider international framework and political context on the success of the eco-social policies and practices presented above.

In the Costa Rican case, the national strategy toward sustainability complied with the international institutional modalities in place at that time, namely the emerging carbon market. Unlike the other two cases, Costa Rica achieved a rare case of a win-win scenario as it benefited from an international governance mechanism that made eco-social considerations compatible with economic profitability. Within this conducive institutional context, Costa Rica attracted resources in a timely way and acted as an enabler of market mechanisms. Although the success rested on other factors as well (for instance, the appeal of the country's natural environment for eco-tourism), the international context has played an essential role in making the national endeavour work.

The ITT initiative, on the other hand, would have been more successful if there was a supportive transboundary mechanism to deal with global impacts of natural resource use. Similarly, it would have needed to attract more support from international donors.

Yet Ecuador's approach did not match any existing framework. The international actors were presented with an innovative approach to environmental protection that did not provide them with any warranty. It did not guarantee that the strategy would have been implemented and governed in a way that would sanction non-compliance. This incompatibility has affected the success of the proposal: Ecuador was not willing to give up oil revenues for environmental integrity unless there was sufficient financial and political support of external actors. Although many have questioned Correa's willingness to actually enforce the plan, the missing funding and recognition from international players made the implementation of the proposal much less likely.

The DRC case is a bit different, as the Virunga Alliance is an eco-social grassroots project, rather than a national policy. Nevertheless, it is evident that the international political, economic and institutional context has also influenced this case. First, the problems faced by the Virunga Alliance are largely triggered by the high global demand for oil. Second, and similar to the case of Ecuador, there is no international agency able to govern the national use of natural resources and ensure a balanced allocation of costs and benefits between countries. Similarly, both the Ecuadorian and the Virunga cases point to the limited power of UNESCO, which is unable to enforce environmental protection in world heritage sites.

In all three cases, international context and institutions have therefore impacted the implementation of eco-social initiatives. Their potential for success has been influenced by the wider global political and economic context, that has either sustained a strategy—as in Costa Rica—or failed to ensure the implementation of another—as in Ecuador. This suggests that national eco-social policies are influenced by what happens at the global level, and by global agents' priorities and mainstream approach to development. The success of eco-social policies thus rests at least to some extent on international debates and the availability of supporting mechanisms. In order to facilitate eco-social policy making, countries need an institutional and governance mechanism to support implementation.

National approach and policy framework for eco-social development

I will discuss here how the implementation of the eco-social policy or project was impacted by national-level commitments and policies to pursue social and environmental goals.

In Costa Rica, the government had already identified environmental protection as a stepping-stone for its future, and sound environmental and social policies had been developed prior to the introduction of the PES scheme. Costa Rica's approach to development had evolved over a relatively long time, and various measures had been taken in an eco-social direction. Abolishing the army allowed the country to channel large funds toward education, health and other social policies (Brown and Bird 2011). In addition, the country had released several policies to protect the environment. When the PES scheme started, policies were thus supportive and the efforts of all national actors converged so that the country performed remarkably well in terms of policy coherence. In addition, Costa Rica decided to incorporate the PES scheme in its national development plan. The government could thus put much effort on this objective and effectively coordinate the work of various agencies, while making the plan much more convincing for donor countries. The country was thus well-equipped and keen to pursue an eco-social shift, which it then successfully did. Legislation has not always resulted in

the implementation of eco-social policies, but played an important role in supporting or hindering them, depending on design and enforcement.

Things were different in both Ecuador and the DRC, where the few environmental policies in place at the time of the proposals were not enforced, and governmental bodies were not capable of ensuring their appropriate implementation. Costa Rica has had the time to develop the government's capacities to fully engage the local population, encourage livelihood change and allow effective participation in the PES scheme. Ecuador's ITT initiative, in contrast, was not preceded by a well-established natural resources management system. The country did not follow an eco-social development approach until the ITT proposal was publicly presented. The adoption of the initiative would not have been supported by appropriate policies able to reinforce its implementation. The country's economy relied heavily on oil, investments in social policy were limited and the environment was weakly protected. Although the government claimed to be ready to renounce mineral resources for the sake of social and environmental integrity, the evidence did not support such claims. Therefore, the ITT initiative, as an isolated measure, might have appeared unrealistic and unachievable to potential supporters and donors. In retrospect, Correa's quick decision to withdraw the proposal suggests that his intention was not very resolute. This might have hindered the development of alternative proposals for keeping the oil in the ground.

In the case of the Virunga Alliance, the project has been impacted by the apparent incapacity of the government to prioritize eco-social aspects in its development strategy. The overarching challenges faced by the country, including economic hardship and dependence on oil, made it extremely difficult for the DRC to pursue basic environmental standards and to embrace an eco-social development perspective. This created a gap between the project's vision and the national development approach, challenging the continuation of the Virunga Alliance.

Both the Congo and Ecuador cases also highlight the difficult issue of national ownership of natural resources and remaining gaps in international environmental law. The absence of mechanisms for sanctioning non-compliance with environmental laws and regulation hinders effective environmental protection at the global level. In both cases, an eco-social policy or project would have been an isolated and idealistic attempt, incompatible with the existing framework.

The three cases show that the country's broader approach to eco-social development is an important factor for the effective adoption of eco-social policies. The Latin American cases demonstrate that the likelihood of successfully implementing such interventions is higher if the government targets eco-social development. The Virunga case, on the contrary, showed that eco-social practices can be undermined by national level policies that are not in line with an eco-social approach. In that case, even the implementation of grassroots-level practices will be challenging. Additional factors determine a country's readiness to change its development paradigm. Costa Rica has, for example, benefited from its natural environment, the limited amount of oil and its political stability, which enabled the strong tourism sector and contributed substantially to the national economy. Although the Amazon and Virunga National Park could potentially pursue the same strategy, not all countries can harness their natural environments in a similar way. In particular, countries in conflict settings face more difficulties in mobilizing necessary resources and ensuring sustainable resources management. The setup of the economy and respective situation of a country influence the feasibility and consequently the national inclination to eco-social development pathways.

Considering the combination of factors, it seems that a supportive legal and policy framework is crucial for the effective implementation of eco-social policies and practices. Harcourt (2012:3) further stresses that “we do not only need ‘green economy’, but also ‘green governance’ that synergizes local governance and macro-level policy”. Good governance that establishes responsibilities, rights and obligations and eliminates corruption thus needs to be accompanied by an appropriate legal framework. The Costa Rican case illustrates that the integration of eco-social policies in national plans can foster policy coherence, encourage the implementation of the policies and increase their likelihood of success.

Economic interference

I will discuss here how the economic component impacted the implementation of eco-social policies and practices in the case studies’ contexts.

In the case of Costa Rica, the economic framework was conducive to the implementation of the PES scheme, which was encouraged by the revenue generated through carbon offsetting mobilizing significant resources from the international community. Owing to favourable timing and the country’s tourism potential, implementing the PES scheme was a cost-effective step toward sustainable economic development.

In contrast to Costa Rica, Ecuador’s proposal did not imply such a clear-cut market logic. Ecuador proposed itself as a guarantor of conservation regardless of private interests, for the sake of social benefits. In the scheme developed by Correa, there was no incentive for private actors as it was not linked to making profit. While carbon trading represented a property-based regime focusing on exclusive rights, Ecuador’s plan meant selling something without giving buyers a value in return. This might have been one of the predominant reasons for low levels of funds gathered and the failure of the initiative. Moreover, even if the request for financial support had a clear symbolic value, Ecuador—as an oil-led economy—would have lost an important share of its exports without additional support from international actors. Confronted with this scenario, Correa prioritized economic gains over social and environmental considerations.

Giving up on the revenue of oil would be equally drastic for the DRC, where the economy is largely dependent on mineral resources. In addition, the DRC’s case is challenged by the country’s dependence on international aid, which limits its capacity to reject the mainstream economic model and international market logics. As in the other cases, financial needs seem to subordinate environmental and social concerns, resulting in negative impacts on the operation of Virunga Alliance.

The analysis of the three cases shows that the economic component significantly conditions the uptake or abandonment of eco-social policies, and undermines their continuation. In both the DRC and Ecuador, economic concerns were prioritized over social and environmental ones. Civil society interests have been subordinated to economic growth and the social and environmental costs of deforestation and oil exploitation were disregarded. This analysis therefore suggests that the economic component dominates countries’ choices when they are presented with the possibility to shift their development approach. Economic revenues still risk overtaking social and environmental considerations. Eco-social policies must thus be tailored to the specific economic context and incorporate environmental and social considerations in a way that

is conducive to contributing to a more balanced development model. Otherwise, the risk of the economic component overshadowing eco-social considerations is very high. It is important to keep in mind that environmental preservation and social inclusion cannot be measured and valued in mere monetary dimensions. Ecological and social standards require regulatory governance mechanisms able to frame economic development paths.

Actors involved

It is worth exploring the contribution of different actors in promoting actions and practices that are conducive to better social and environmental outcomes, and observing whose knowledge and values frame agendas and influence policies (Cook et al. 2012).

In Costa Rica, a variety of actors—including civil society organizations, NGOs, international donors, private actors and the state—cooperate within the PES scheme. Although the government promoted the top-down scheme, civil society soon came to play an important role. Owing to the economic incentives, farmers have taken up reforestation and became stewards of the environment. In addition, a number of national NGOs have addressed the shortcomings of the state intervention and worked to make the scheme more inclusive. The government's willingness to change the national development paradigm has been crucial. Local level ownership, good communication between various actors, and financial support received by the international community have been other key factors in ensuring an effective implementation of the PES scheme.

In Ecuador, civil society organizations have played a prominent role in advocating for the protection of the ITT. The proposal later moved to the management of the government, which led to differing requests between civil society and state. In addition, the mobilization of the civil society in Ecuador has involved different groups of the population. Because of the small number of relatively isolated people directly affected by the ITT exploitation, various NGOs took up their cause. Yasunidos has launched national and international advocacy campaigns for the protection of the park. Another NGO started campaigning for the opposing goal of exploiting oil. Such discrepancies created confusion among parts of the population, who were unsure which step would be better for the country. In spite of Yasunidos' efforts, Correa managed to call for an exception to the Constitution, which decided on the future of the Yasuní based on economic interests. The Ecuadorian case was therefore characterized by a large variety of actors pursuing different goals through different strategies. The diverging interests and ineffective negotiation process have contributed to the failure of the ITT initiative.

In the DRC case, an NGO entered a precarious setting with the ambition to improve living conditions and protect wildlife. The NGO informed the local population of the drawbacks of oil exploitation and proved that a more responsible use of the park's natural resources would improve their lives, so that the dwellers started to oppose SOCO's intervention in the area. The NGO has not been able to equally influence the government's position on oil exploitation, however, thus increasing the gap between these two levels. Again, the interests of the various parties did not match, and power asymmetries favouring private companies' interests became evident. The recently released documentary *Virunga* raised awareness at the international level and triggered advocacy and lobbying campaigns for the protection of Virunga National Park.

In both the Virunga and Ecuadorian cases, NGOs have been significant players that shaped civil society engagement as well as the debate, not only at the local but also at the international level. However, in neither of the two cases have they been able to influence the adoption of an eco-social policy at the national level. In addition,

advocacy campaigns had to confront the vested interests of different groups with differing levels of power. This might get distorted in the public realm and the media, leaving the public insecure and unable to weigh the pros and cons of opposing initiatives.

Moreover, the two cases show that significant power asymmetries remain between different actors and that the population is often not able to influence processes of institutional change. In Ecuador, the government has declared the majority of signatures for the referendum invalid without fully explaining why; in Congo the civil society requests have been ignored altogether. In both cases, participation was lacking in terms of procedural justice (to ensure fair decision-making processes) and distributive justice (to ensure fair outcomes and impacts) (compare Cook et al. 2012). The ability of all groups to participate in or contest policy choices is vital, however, in any transition to a sustainable and equitable green development (Cook and Smith 2012).⁴⁴

Outlook for Future Research

The preliminary analysis presented in this paper highlighted obstacles as well as opportunities for the implementation of eco-social policies. As a consequence, the key findings allow us to derive hypotheses for future research. The analysis suggests the following.

- i. The implementation of eco-social policies is shaped by the global level and the priorities and predominant approaches of key global development actors. In order for eco-social policies to flourish at the national level, an international enabling environment needs to be created. As long as eco-social policies are not part of a clear global agenda, there is little likelihood that countries will make isolated efforts toward an eco-social approach. Further research can identify necessary elements of a supportive institutional environment that is able to ensure that eco-social goals do not fall behind other priorities.
- ii. Economic feasibility and national development needs remain central in the implementation of eco-social policies. Resource mobilization is key for the implementation of eco-social policies and needs to be incorporated in any initiative or proposal. Further research is needed to identify strategies that can ensure that the economic aspect will not be the only determinant of eco-social policies' success.
- iii. The likelihood of success seems to increase when eco-social policies are aligned with national development plans and with the work plan of international organizations operating in the respective country. The integration in national plans increases the resources available and the scale and coherence of the intervention, and allows all stakeholders to cooperate for shared goals.
- iv. It is important to investigate how participation and collaborative governance can be ensured and how power relations in decision-making processes can be reconfigured. Although the active participation of civil society is crucial in ensuring the effective implementation of environmental policies, more work is needed to assess in which contexts citizens' claims have been heard and

⁴⁴ UNRISD identifies three forms of participation that are particularly relevant: (i) resource mobilization at the local or community level; (ii) access and influence in decision-making processes or governance; and (iii) forms of resistance and advocacy on the part of social movements and civil society networks that aim to frame public policy and debate regarding priority concerns and development pathways (Cook et al. 2012).

addressed and the extent to which their participation is beneficial. The potential and limits of civil society engagement should therefore be further investigated.

- v. This paper has outlined a number of challenges associated with the implementation of eco-social policies and practices that need to be overcome in order to foster their transformative potential for sustainable development. More research is needed, however, to analyse in which contexts eco-social policies can address underlying structural constraints, and if and how they can support the transformation to sustainable development in a way that is environmentally sound and socially inclusive.
- vi. The knowledge we have on the linkages between the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development remains limited. While much has been written on the social impacts of environmental disruption, the body of research on the impacts a steady social system has on national environmental performance remains insufficient. Based on these considerations, investigating the interface between social policies and environmental policies and differences in performance might be revealing.

This paper has presented three cases in which an eco-social approach has been taken up. By conducting a comparative analysis, the paper identified factors that impact the likelihood of success of eco-social policies and steps that might encourage their adoption. The relatively new field of eco-social practices needs further research. We need a better understanding of how a more conducive policy environment for eco-social practices can be created and how they can contribute to sustainable development, so as to allow policy makers to make the most of these emerging and promising practices. As a consequence, larger empirical studies and more detailed analysis is needed in order to draw lessons applicable to different contexts which highlight the potential and limitations of eco-social policies in the pursuit of sustainability.

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