



Participation constrained: Generating buy-in and rationalizing carbon forestry labor through participatory mapping in Southern Mexico



Jonathan Otto

Miami University, 501 E High St., Oxford, OH 45056, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 September 2015
Received in revised form 8 August 2016
Accepted 26 August 2016
Available online 31 August 2016

Keywords:

PES
Mapping
Participation
Labor
Discourse
Mexico

ABSTRACT

In recent years diverse actors have hailed participatory practice as an effective means to empowering people in payment for ecosystem services (PES) work. In Chiapas, Mexico participation is a central component of the Scolel' Te carbon forestry program, the cornerstone of which includes Plan Vivo participatory mapping. Plan Vivo mapping is used by the managing NGO, AMBIO, to build trust relations between participating farmers and program managers so as to ensure the successful production of carbon credits. However, I argue that it is also used to instill in farmers a series of behavioral and attitudinal transformations designed to align farmer land-use activities and attitudes with the program's carbon credit production objectives. Yet, despite these ambitions, the ability of the mapping activity in Scolel' Te to achieve its stated goals is challenged on the ground. In order to explain this discrepancy between the aspirations tied to the mapping activity and the mapping experience, I assess Plan Vivo mapping as a situated discourse and as a labor process. Taking the former perspective, I show how the managing NGO uses a paternalistic discourse to justify participatory mapping, one that presents farmers as misguided resource managers in need of external intervention. Then, using a labor process approach, I show how PVM acts to reorient farmer relationships to their land and to development organizations by intervening in farmer land-use practices and by establishing trust relations. It is, however, a process that consists of inequalities that stand to potentially limit the effectiveness of the activity.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In July 2013 Mexican President, Enrique Peña Nieto, presented AMBIO, a small non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Mexico's southernmost state, Chiapas, with the Premio Nacional al Mérito Forestal for its work with the payment for ecosystem services (PES) Scolel' Te forest carbon program.¹ The award was given for what Mexico's National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) recognized as AMBIO's success in promoting and conserving ecosystem services and in encouraging the participation and training of local farmers (referred to also as 'participating farmers' and 'carbon foresters' in this article).² Such recognition, however, was not new to the program, nor had it been limited to the organization's domestic

¹ E-mail address: ottojj3@gmail.com

¹ The Premio Nacional al Mérito Forestal is an award given annually by Mexico's National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) for forestry promotion and environmental conservation.

² AMBIO's success in managing the program is visible in the fact that since the organization's creation in 1998, Scolel' Te has expanded from 47 farmers in six communities (see Brown and Corbera, 2003) to include over 1100 farmers representing 77 communities and eight Mayan languages in the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca.

realm of influence. In fact, the program has received international acclaim, as has the participation-oriented Plan Vivo Standard under which carbon capture activities are organized – a standard that was developed originally in Chiapas, and which has since been adopted globally across 17 countries (Díaz Vázquez, 2013).

Scolel' Te is one example of PES schemes that propose a double aim of poverty alleviation and also global climate change mitigation, achieving both by paying farmers to offset CO₂ emissions via the establishment of farmer-managed agroforestry systems. Farmer payments are derived from the sale of carbon credits – certificates that verify CO₂ capture by these agroforestry systems – to individuals, governments, non-governmental organizations, and private companies in international voluntary carbon markets. In the Scolel' Te program, the managing NGO, AMBIO, acts as an intermediary between farmers producing carbon credits and domestic and international buyers, thus ensuring that payments are made to program participants. Additionally, AMBIO promotes and implements the program in rural communities across Chiapas, while also managing activities among previously enrolled participants.

Beyond this story of poverty alleviation and climate change mitigation, though, is another story, one told by international

conservation and development agencies, in which the good work done by this program requires the transformation of farmers, who must adopt new behavioral patterns and attitudes that are needed for long-term conservation. The Plan Vivo Foundation – the Scottish charity established to develop and supervise the Plan Vivo Standard – suggests, for instance, that “The [carbon forestry] model requires active participation and ownership of activities by communities – where participating smallholders and groups take a leading role in the production and implementation of their own land management plan. . .” (Plan Vivo Foundation, 2013: p. 2). Such transformative participation, practitioners argue, not only ensures the success of carbon forestry, but also empowers farmers to take ownership of their work – outcomes that facilitate the establishment of farmer buy-in and preserve continued carbon credit production. In the case of the Scolel’ Te program, such transformations are sought through the use of a participatory mapping activity, Plan Vivo mapping (referred to from here on as PVM), a cornerstone of the program’s inclusive design.

The benefits of participatory mapping to carbon forestry are considered to be twofold by the managing NGO, AMBIO. First, NGO leadership notes that the participatory nature of Scolel’ Te distinguishes the program from other controversial development and conservation programs across Chiapas’ development landscape, projects that have inspired distrust among disenfranchised participants. Thus, they argue that it provides an effective means for generating trust relations between the NGO and program participants. Second, project managers argue that the mapping activity has the effect of disciplining farmer labor in the carbon credit production process, thereby diminishing the need for continued NGO supervision of program activities over time. However, while these factors are central to the success of Scolel’ Te in Chiapas, the PVM activity serves an additional important purpose for the program that is of particular interest in this discussion. In this article, I argue that the PVM activity is designed to train participating farmers to value their land for its capacity to produce commodified CO₂ – carbon credits – and to see themselves as potential manufacturers of that good. From this perspective, the work of carrying out the PVM activity represents a central component of AMBIO’s responsibility as an intermediary in the carbon credit commodity chain: to ensure the successful production of carbon credits in the fight against global climate change.

The centrality of participation in the Scolel’ Te program has led to its identification as an example of *social forestry* rather than simply ‘carbon forestry’ – with the social aspect used in reference to its uniquely participatory approach to producing carbon credits (Courtenay, 2005). In the 1990s the World Bank and the Ford Foundation touted the importance of participation in conservation and development programs, using this term and others such as *social capital*. From such perspectives, stakeholders were understood to be central to the success of a given forest management or development program (see Ostrom (2005), for example). Influenced by this work, development and conservation practitioners focused on turning people into capital by changing how they acted in relation to one another such that they could contribute productively to the success of a development or conservation project. However, despite the popularity of these terms, critics have argued that their meaning is vague (see Smith and Kulynych, 2002). Fine (2007), moreover, argues that such perspectives fail to recognize the role of the state, class, power, and conflict in the social relations associated with a given program.

Drawing inspiration from critiques of social forestry and social capital, I suggest that participatory mapping in carbon forestry tends to conceal as much as it reveals. For AMBIO and for proponents of the Scolel’ Te program, participatory mapping represents a useful means for enhancing the capacity of trees to capture CO₂ and mitigate global climate change. Yet, such perspectives obscure

the human labor of carbon forestry by focusing on the intended outcome – the replication of the CO₂ sequestration services provided by trees. Moreover, they conceal the fact that PVM ultimately reinscribes farmer land-use activities within capitalist social relations designed to produce environmental commodities for sale in international markets. However, in practice, the labor of producing participatory maps and the labor relations oriented around carbon credit production that are established in the PVM activity are quite complex, consisting of power dynamics that threaten to limit the ability of the managing NGO to effectively use the activity to achieve its objectives. In order to show how this occurs, I examine these labor dynamics, paying particular attention to inequalities in the mapping process and to the paternalistic discourse that accompanies the use of the mapping activity. In doing so, the limitations in the ability of the NGO to use PVM to generate trust relations with farmers and to discipline their labor in the carbon forestry program become visible.

In this article I draw on data obtained from interviews and participant observation conducted with the managing NGO and three participating communities in the western Sierra Madre region of Chiapas during 2011 and 2012 (see Fig. 1.1). The managing NGO provided me with permission to study the Scolel’ Te program using these methods, and generously allowed me to join mapping coordinators on trips to communities in the Sierra Madre region where PVM activities were carried out. Taken together, these methods provided the necessary means for illuminating the managing NGO’s assumptions, goals, and strategies that underpin the use of the PVM activity in Scolel’ Te. Data obtained through seven semi-structured interviews with project managers and mapping coordinators revealed the discourse in which the PVM activity is framed, and uncovered the NGO’s thinking about the value of participatory mapping for carbon forestry.

While interviews revealed NGO thinking about the PVM activity, it was through participant observation that the inequalities in the mapping activity became apparent. Participant observation related to PVM was carried out in one community in the Sierra Madre region where I observed the Plan Vivo mapping process conducted on a community-wide scale. Moreover, I observed conversations about the activity, including strategies for how to improve its realization, at two bi-annual farmer-training meetings led by AMBIO. In the first case, inequalities became apparent in the mapping process, particularly in observing how NGO mapping coordinators and participating farmers interacted during the mapping process. While participant observation of the mapping process occurred in only one community, the observed characteristics of that activity were corroborated through conversations with farmers across two communities who had participated in the PVM activity in the same region and with NGO leadership. It was in these conversations that some farmers also expressed discontent with the activity.

Drawing on this ethnographic data, I analyze the PVM activity in four parts. First, I situate Scolel’ Te within the broader carbon market context in which the program operates and within Chiapas’ complex development landscape, shedding light on why AMBIO considers participatory mapping to be necessary. Second, I turn to critical social theory, political ecology, labor studies literature and critical mapping literature to show why it is necessary to view the PVM activity as a discourse and a means for organizing farmer labor. Third, I illustrate how the mapping exercise, although billed as a democratic activity, is imbued with power inequalities that limit its effectiveness. Finally, I assess PVM as a situated discourse, illustrating how the logics that underpin the use of the activity in the PES program feature a short-sighted understanding of farmers and farmer land-use practices, and how that discourse, in turn, motivates the restructuring of farmer land-use activities.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073466>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5073466>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)