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Economic displacement and local attitude towards protected area establishment in the Peruvian Amazon

Mario Cardozo *

Department of Geography and the Environment, The University of Texas at Austin, USA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines socioeconomic factors linked to different local attitudes towards the establishment in 2004 of the Allpahuayo-Mishana National Reserve, Peruvian Amazon. Semistructured interviews were conducted in 2006 and 2007 with leaders ($N = 16$) and household heads ($N = 102$) of smallholder communities in the reserve and its buffer zone. Complementary qualitative and quantitative analyses of interview data reveal that household head attitude towards the reserve is primarily associated with loss or gain of resource use rights; there is a significant difference in attitude between the household heads interviewed in the reserve and those in the buffer zone. Communities in the region used to share certain lands and floodplains, especially for the extraction of fish, poletimber, and thatch palm. With the reserve's establishment, only those who lived within the reserve were allowed to continue using previously shared resources, while the access of neighboring communities, now in the buffer zone, was banned from most of the reserve. A linear predictive model reveals that attitude towards the reserve also relates to location and household demographic variables, hypothesized to influence the household's capacity to respond to losses in income sources and subsistence means. Comparisons of leaders' and residents' responses suggest that although involuntary economic displacement has affected many locals, government authorities have not addressed the issue satisfactorily, at least from the perspective of those displaced, thus obscuring the conservation-related exclusion that occurred.

1. Introduction

Many tropical forests targeted for conservation are inhabited, socioeconomic spaces. The global need to protect biodiversity has turned into a powerful force that at times can support the involuntary displacement of traditional peoples (Agrawal and Redford, 2009; Brown, 1998; Geisler, 2002; Stevens, 1997). Conservation approaches proposing strict nature protection prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s, substantially increasing the number of protected areas in developing countries, and often transferring the governance of the resources in question from locals to national governments (Igoe and Brockington, 2007; Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995; Zimmerer et al., 2004). Concurrently, a number of traditional communities were displaced, often to the disadvantage of their livelihoods and cultural identity (Dowie, 2005; Igoe and Brockington, 2007). Growing awareness of the adverse socioeconomic aftermath of strict nature protection policies has encouraged approaches that integrate local political participation in the process of protected area establishment (Naughton-Treves et al., 2006). Participatory processes often result in the implementation of protected areas where controlled human intervention is allowed (e.g., extractive reserves), instead of those that usually lead to locals' displacement (e.g., national parks) (Stevens, 1997).

The following study illustrates a particular case in which a purportedly participatory process in the establishment of a national reserve has generated considerable local opposition. Originally, the Peruvian state and scientific community envisioned a strictly protected category for the area now defined as the Allpahuayo-Mishana National Reserve in the Peruvian Amazon (Salo and Pyhälä, 2007). After negotiations with smallholder communities fighting displacement, the area was finally categorized as a national reserve in 2004, allowing residence and controlled resource extraction by groups dwelling within (Salo and Pyhälä, 2007). Residents of some neighboring communities, currently in the buffer zone, had traditionally extracted resources from the region before the reserve's creation and are now banned from using part of the resources on which they had relied for decades.

This study explores some of the socioeconomic reasons for the polarized attitudes that the establishment of the Allpahuayo-Mishana National Reserve has generated among locals. While there are other factors associated with local attitude towards conservation initiatives (e.g., cosmographies and other cultural matters), this article emphasizes the socioeconomic logic behind the opposition to or support of the state-sponsored reconfiguration of resource

* Address: The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Geography and the Environment, 1 University Station A3100, Austin, TX 78712, USA.
E-mail address: mcardozo@mail.utexas.edu

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use rights. The first section of this study addresses the debates that relate state conservation initiatives, displacement, political participation, and the spatiality of local livelihoods. It is important to address these issues because many locals believe their socioeconomic needs and resource use institutions were not considered in the process that politically and spatially reconfigured resource use rights in the region. Next, the political economic structures that motivated the creation of the Allpahuayo-Mishana National Reserve are reviewed in order to characterize the particular process of its establishment. Finally, some of the local socioeconomic factors related to attitude towards the reserve's establishment are examined based on responses from community leaders and household heads. Among those consulted, attitude towards the reserve is found to be primarily associated with loss or gain of resource use rights and whether locals felt included or excluded in the process of the protected area's establishment. Specific household characteristics–location and household demographic variables — also relate to attitude towards the reserve, as they influence the household's capacity to respond to losses of income sources and subsistence means. In addition, findings point at a disconnect between some community leaders' discourses and the opinions of fellow residents, contributing to obscuring the fact that involuntary economic displacement occurred.

2. Conservation and displacement

Eviction is often discussed as an extreme social consequence of biodiversity conservation initiatives and other development projects, particularly as it affects traditional communities (Agrawal and Redford, 2009; Cernea, 2000; Dowie, 2005; Geisler, 2002; Stevens, 1997). Conservation initiatives may also result in other forms of involuntary displacement besides eviction. National parks may be established in areas that are not inhabited but have been traditionally managed. In this case, eviction is not enforced, but the exclusion of resource use is likely to displace livelihoods and require alternative income sources and subsistence means. "Restriction of access" can be regarded as a form of "economic displacement" (Cernea, 2005). Agrawal and Redford (2009) criticize the use of the term displacement as restriction of access: "Such an expansive meaning actually obscures the plight of those who are physically separated from their land and homes" (p. 2). The current study aligns with Brockington and Igoe's (2010) interpretation of displacement. Citing Cernea (2005), these authors state that conservation displacement includes two processes: "(i) the forced removal of people from their homes; and (ii) economic displacement, the exclusion of people from particular areas in their pursuit of a livelihood... Exclusion of economic activity, which does not lead to moving home, still displaces that activity elsewhere" (Brockington and Igoe, 2010, p. 425).

Criticism of conservation displacement has encouraged the design of protected areas that are inclusive of human habitation and use (Naughton-Treves et al., 2006; Stevens, 1997). Inclusive protected areas are often the result of participatory processes in which locals, the government, and scientists collaborate to create a conservation space that attends to socioeconomic and biodiversity protection needs. Local participation may also result in voluntary displacement if strict nature protection is required, especially when adequate alternatives and compensation packages are offered (Beazley, 2009). Allowing locals to negotiate the conditions under which they will stay or leave their traditional territories may prove paramount in achieving conservation and social justice (Beazley, 2009). A number of national governments, transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and multilateral development agencies have adapted their development and conservation discourses to consider issues of social justice and sustainable livelihoods, and to promote purportedly bottom-up approaches to project implementation (Cernea, 2000, 2005; IUCN, 1980).

Particularly in developing countries, governments may not have the financial and logistic resources to enforce park patrolling or evict settlements from recently created protected areas (Brockington and Igoe, 2010). It has become increasingly important to engage in participatory processes in order to realize conservation planning and management. Compensation packages and remedial projects usually aim at offering alternatives to losses related to displacement, including (1) loss of access to social networks, common property, and natural resources, and (2) consequent losses in livelihood opportunities and income sources (Agrawal and Redford, 2009; Cernea, 2000). Still, one of the most problematic steps when initiating a participatory process is to identify the local groups that must be included when planning a protected area. Locals who have resided for generations in areas targeted for conservation are easy to identify as "stakeholders," yet, more nuanced questions about the spatiality of resource use practices must be asked within participatory approaches. For instance, the establishment of national reserves in Peru may result in the partitioning of resource use rights into ascribed groups and extractive quotas, which can conflict with preexisting institutions that include a wider range of local users and a complex set of multisited and seasonally variable resource management practices. Most smallholder communities in the Peruvian Amazon do not have legal titles for the territories they inhabit and use (Espinosa, 2008); different communities may share extractive territories, sometimes in complex ways perceived differently by each community or even among households. Roth (2008) suggests that "conservation conflict between the state and local communities is shaped in part by the different spatialities produced through their distinct institutions of resource management" (p. 388). In a similar fashion, the current study proposes that the spatiality of livelihoods be carefully examined so that unknown relationships among households, communities, and extractive territories can be considered when formulating conservation policies within participatory approaches.

3. Development and conservation in the northeastern Peruvian Amazon

3.1. The Iquitos region

Resources in the Amazon Basin (Fig. 1) have long been subjected to political and economic competition, nationally and globally. High in biodiversity and abundant in resources, the Amazon is also culturally rich, housing numerous indigenous groups, traditional peoples of mixed descent, and immigrants from other regions that add to a growing population (Billsborrow, 2003; Coomes, 1995; Hecht and Cockburn, 1990; Moran, 1991; Santos Granero and Barclay, 2002). The rise of extractive activities aimed at global markets (e.g., native rubber, mining, timber, and oil industries) has accelerated population growth and urbanization in the region since the nineteenth century (Barham and Coomes, 1994; Coomes, 1995). In the Brazilian Amazon, rural frontiers have expanded as production systems have shifted from swidden agriculture to more intensive and extensive land uses (e.g., cattle ranching, soy production) and as population and competition for land have increased in urbanizing regions (Andersen et al., 2002; Hiraoka, 1995; Walker, 2004). Rural populations near cities are increasingly confronted with similar developments in the Peruvian Amazon. Iquitos, capital of the department of Loreto, is the largest city in the western Amazon, with a population of nearly 371,000 (INEI, 2010).[1] Iquitos

[1] Based on the 2007 census, greater Iquitos' population was estimated adding the urban populations of the districts of Iquitos, Belén, San Juan Bautista, and Punchana.