

Abstract

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Title

Contradictions of International Cooperation in the Amazon: Why is the nation-state left out?

Subject / Theme

5.1- Behavioral economics, policy and institutions

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Authors and Presenters

Name: Joseph Weiss **PRESENTER**

Affiliation: Universidade de Brasilia

Abstract

Joseph S. Weiss, Elimar Nascimento, Marcel Bursztyn and Donald Sawyer

International cooperation practitioners saw hope for their efforts as environment became an important issue while neoliberalism and the minimum state were at their peaks. Capacity-building in the environment received only rhetorical support, even though the nation-state was essential to the success of environmental programs, as shown in two Amazon case studies.

Concepts

While neoliberalism was at its peak, environmental issues came to the forefront climaxing with the UNCED conference in 1992, seeking the means to include environmental aspects in defiance of the “multilateral organization – North governments – multinational corporation” coalition, essential element of the profit-driven capitalist globalization process. The approach which then prevailed was to minimize the role of the nation-state, excluded from the call to “think globally, act locally”, although the need to build national environmental capacities was mentioned.

The world became increasingly concerned with the environment, deteriorating environmental assets and global climate change, shared by increasing numbers of stakeholders. Even neoliberals admitted that the State had a role in defining rules and

assuring compliance.

International organizations recognized the severe environmental impacts resulting from the projects they had financed. International cooperation had become discredited because of poor and even counterproductive results, due to the social and environmental damage they caused. There was the hope that environmental projects could recover foreign aid from its debacle, to take a central role in practical answers for environmental challenges in developing countries.

In the 1990s, industrialized country governments sought to influence the conservation and use of natural resources in the countries of the South, bringing out the potential conflict between the concept of global environmental assets and the development of the South, given the pressure for globalization and the demand for commodities. According to Becker (2004, p. 35), “as the dispute between powers becomes more acute, a new way is found to try to overcome conflicts and pressure periphery countries to assume control over territorial decisions: Temporary alliances to act on specific spaces and issues ... through international cooperation.”

This was still within the approach of reducing the role of the nation-state, seeking to work as much as possible with the private sector, civil society organizations and local governments. Were emerging countries seen as potential competitors that it didn't pay to strengthen?

National governments at the “center” tried to bypass those at the “periphery” by contacting local communities and governments directly. They tried to avoid government control by building direct client relationships at the local level. This didn't work as benefits remained mostly local. It failed to strengthen already underfunded environmental agencies and lessened their capacity to deal with global warming.

Sajar and VanDeveer (2005) make clear that while environmental capacity-building attracted multilateral organization attention again in the late 1990s, it was defined, when applied, to transfer ineffective North models to the South to make success more likely for programs defined by the North. By allowing for NGO participation, national governments are often left with reduced control or power.

According to Bustamante (2008), both multilateral and bilateral international cooperation can bring social and environmental benefits to the countries of the South. But, more than a means to seek to achieve certain goals and objectives, cooperation can often be an instrument to permanently maintain the asymmetry in the world system. The separate roles of North and South organizations can become a trap to assure permanent dependence.

Given this historical context, efforts were made to build “multilateral – national – non-governmental – local” environmental coalitions, including in the Amazon. These were necessarily weak compared with the dominant coalitions referred to above. They did not have a role beyond environmental programs. The national has been the weakest link in these coalitions even though it is where economic growth – environment conflicts are exacerbated.

Additional concepts, methods and data sources

A broad interdisciplinary set of additional concepts – regarding stakeholder behavior, conflicts, power relations, cultures in complex organizations and their environmental governance consequences – were applied in analyzing participating organizations in two international backed programs in the Amazon. The two case studies were the Pilot Program to Conserve the Brazilian Rain Forest – PPG7 and the South America-wide USAID Amazon Basin Conservation Initiative. Documents, evaluations and interviews carried out by Hagemann (1994) were analyzed and the authors carried out their own non-structured stakeholder interviews.

Key Results and Conclusions

The resources spent on these programs were considerably less than those spent in “developing” the Amazon. They failed to promote Government and NGO motivation and capacity for more effective participation.

The North proposed environmental coalitions in which the nation-states needed stronger roles.

In the Pilot Program, (a) while the multilateral organizations identified the lack of capacity of public implementation agencies to carry out environmental programs, they chose to fill this vacuum rather than empower the national government and (b) the resulting institutional bottlenecks diminished the prospect for an expanded second phase of the program.

In the ABCI, the lack of appropriate consultations with nation-states prevented NGO implementation of cross-border programs.

Implications for Ecological Economics

There is a need to integrate ecological economics and ecological politics so as to better analyze the incentives needed to empower nation-states in their environmental roles and increase their effectiveness in working with private and civil society organizations.

Key references

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